MILLY AND OLLY

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MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

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THERE WERE CROWDS OF PEOPLE AT THE STATION.

(See page 46)

Frontispiece.

MILLY AND OLLY

OR

A HOLIDAY AMONG THE MOUNTAINS

A STORY FOR CHILDREN

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

WITH FORTY-EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILLY POGANY

LONDON AND LEIPSIC
T. FISHER UNWIN
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First Edition, 1881, Reprinted, 1894.
Second Edition, with a New Preface, 1907.

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TO

F. A.

IN THE NAME OF
THE CHILDREN OF FOX HOW,
THIS REVIVAL OF A CHILD'S STORY
WRITTEN TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS AGO,
UNDER THE SPELL OF ROTHA AND FAIRFIELD,
IS INSCRIBED BY THE WRITER.

September, 1907.

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PREFACE

AFTER many years this little book is once more to see the light. The children for whom it was written are long since grown up. But perhaps the pleasure they once took in it may still be felt by some of the Millys and Ollys of to-day. Up in the dear mountain country which it describes the becks are still sparkling; "Brownholme" still spreads its green steeps and ferny hollows under rain and sun; the tiny trout still leap in its tiny streams; and Fairfield, in its noble curve, still girdles the deep valley where these children played: the valley of Wordsworth and Arnold; the valley where Arnold's poet-son rambled as a boy; where, for me, the shy and passionate ghost of Charlotte Brontë still haunts the open doorway of Fox How; where poetry and generous life and ranging thought still have their home, and bring their benediction to the passers-by. On the lawns and by the streams of Loughrigg, the children of to-day find bliss and fairyland, as did their elders before them. The parrot, alas! is gone where parrots may; but amid the voices that breathe around Fox How — the voices of seventy years—his mimic speech is still remembered by the children who teased and loved him. For love, while love lasts, gives life to all things small and great; and in those who have once felt it, the love of the Fairfield valley, of the grey stone house that fronts the fells, and of them that dwell, and have dwelt therein, is "not Time's fool"—

> "Or bends with the remover to remove."

MARY A. WARD.

September 18, 1907.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE
MAKING PLANS 15

CHAPTER II

A JOURNEY NORTH 30

CHAPTER III

RAVENSNEST 57

CHAPTER IV

OUT ON THE HILLS 98

CHAPTER V

AUNT EMMA'S PICNIC 121

CHAPTER VI

PAGE
WET DAYS AT RAVENSNEST 178

CHAPTER VII

A STORY-TELLING GAME 217

CHAPTER VIII

A STORY OF BEOWULF 254

CHAPTER IX

MILLY'S BIRTHDAY AND A MISFORTUNE . . . 292

CHAPTER X

LAST DAYS AT RAVENSNEST . . . 341

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE
THERE WERE CROWDS OF PEOPLE AT THE STATION *Frontispiece*
OLIVER BEGAN TO DANCE ABOUT 17
DOWN SQUATTED THE CHILDREN ON THE FLOOR . 25
TWO PAIRS OF LITTLE HANDS PULLED HIM EAGERLY INTO THE ROOM 31
OUT SPRANG SPOT LIKE A FLASH OF LIGHTNING . 40
WHAT FUN IT WAS HAVING DINNER AT A STATION WITH ALL THE GROWN-UP PEOPLE! . . . 51
NURSE AND MILLY ALWAYS LEFT HIM ALONE TILL HE WAS QUITE WOKE UP 59
"I CAN ROW, FATHER SAID I MIGHT" . . . 64
EACH HOLDING ONE OF FATHER'S HANDS, AND CHATTERING AWAY TO HIM 69
HE CLIMBED UP THE LOGS LIKE A LITTLE SQUIRREL . 77
EVERYBODY HAD TO SCRAMBLE OVER, MOTHER INCLUDED 83
TWO LITTLE GIRLS PERCHED UP ON ONE OF THE CHERRY-TREE BRANCHES 88
HE CAME BANG UP AGAINST HIS MOTHER . . 95
BECKY AND TIZA JUMPING FROM ONE STONE TO ANOTHER LIKE LITTLE FAWNS . . . 99
THE TWO OF THEM ROLLED AWAY TOGETHER . . 108
WITH ONE GRIP HE GOT HOLD OF OLLY UNDER HIS ARM 114
"COME, OLLY, DON'T BE SHY" 118
A GREAT GREEN CAGE CARRIED BY A SERVANT, AND IN IT A GREY PARROT 129
"AIN'T I A USEFUL BOY, AUNT EMMA?" . . . 137
"YOU COULDN'T ROW SO FAST WITHOUT ME, COULD YOU, FATHER?" 147
"YOU GRASSHOPPER, YOU!" SAID MR. NORTON . . 155
"WE NEVER HAD SUCH A NICE TEA AS THIS BEFORE". 160
HE SAT PERCHED UP ON THE GREAT ROCK . . 165

PAGE
"A GREAT BLACK SHIP WAS COMING SLOWLY OVER THE WATER" 173
MILLY CAME STEPPING FROM ONE BIG STONE TO ANOTHER 182
OLLY STRUGGLED HARD TO GET DOWN . . . 187
SHE FOUND A PAIR OF DULL LITTLE FACES STARING OUT AT THE RAIN 191
OLLY SHOT HIM ALL OVER WITH A WALKING-STICK . 197
MOTHER WROTE FOR HIM 204
NURSE DISCOVERED OLLY SMEARING KATIE'S CHEEKS WITH RASPBERRY JAM 212
OLLY WENT CAUTIOUSLY AFTER IT . . . 222
"NOW THEN," HE SAID TO THE QUEEN, "YOU MAY TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES AND STOCKINGS, AND PADDLE ABOUT THIS MUD AS MUCH AS YOU LIKE" . . 237
"SHE DROVE THE SHEEP UP THE SOFT GREEN HILLSIDES" 243
MR. NORTON COULD NOT RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO THROW ONE MORE SOFA CUSHION AT HER LAUGHING FACE 252
"THEY FOUGHT TILL THE BENCHES WERE TORN FROM THE WALLS" 258
"SHE SPRANG UPON BEOWULF AND SEIZED HIM" . 263
OUT RUSHED A TATTERED LITTLE FIGURE WITH A TEAR-STAINED FACE 276
"YOU COME," SHE WHISPERED EAGERLY TO MILLY, PULLING HER BY THE SKIRT 284
JOHN BACKHOUSE MOUNTED BOTH THE CHILDREN ON HIS BIG CARTHORSE DOBBIN 295
MILLY STOPPED SUDDENLY 300
THE SHOPWOMAN WRAPPED IT UP IN A NEAT LITTLE PARCEL 304
THEY WENT TO SAY "GOOD MORNING" TO JOHN BACKHOUSE'S COWS 313
BECKY AND TIZA WERE WAITING FOR THEM . . 318
THEY PUT THEIR HANDKERCHIEFS OVER THEIR FACES, AND LAY AS STILL AS MICE 325
SO ON THEY WENT AGAIN 329
TIZA BEGAN TO CRY AGAIN 334
TIZA KNELT ON THE BED, AND STUFFED A STRAWBERRY SOFTLY INTO BECKY'S MOUTH 344
MR. BACKHOUSE TOOK THEM IN 347

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

MILLY AND OLLY:

OR

A HOLIDAY AMONG THE MOUNTAINS

CHAPTER I

MAKING PLANS

"MILLY, come down! come down directly! Mother wants you. Do make haste!"

"I'm just coming, Olly. Don't stamp so. Nurse is tying my sash."

But Master Olly went on stamping, and jumping up and down stairs, as his way was when he was very much excited, till Milly appeared. Presently down she came, a sober, fair-haired little maiden, with blue eyes and a turn-up nose, and a mouth that was generally rather solemn-looking, though it could laugh merrily enough when it tried. Milly was six years old. She looked older than six. At any rate she looked a great deal older than Olly, who was nearly five; and you will soon find out that she was a good deal more than a year and a half wiser.

"What's the matter, Olly? What made you shout so?"

"Oh, come along, come along!" said the little boy, dragging his sister to make her run. "Mother wants to tell us something, and she says it's a nice something, and she wouldn't tell me without you."

Then the two children set off running, and they flew down a long passage to the drawing-room, and were soon scrambling about a lady who was sitting working by the window.

"Well, monkeys, don't choke me before I tell you my nice something. Now, Milly, guess—what have father and I just been talking about?"

"Sending Olly to school, perhaps," said Milly. "I heard Uncle Richard talking about it yesterday."

"That wouldn't be such a nice something," said Olly, making a long face. "I wouldn't

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

OLIVER BEGAN TO DANCE ABOUT.

17

46

like it—not a bit. Boys don't never like going to school. I want to learn my lessons with mother."

"I know a little boy that doesn't like learning lessons with mother very much," said the lady, laughing. "But my nice something isn't sending Olly to school, Milly. Try again."

"Oh, mother! is it a strawberry tea?" cried Milly. "The strawberries are just ripe, I know. Gardener told nurse so this morning. And we can have tea on the lawn, and ask Jacky and Francis."

"Oh, jolly!" said Oliver, jumping off his mother's knee and beginning to dance about. "And we'll gather them ourselves—won't you let us, mother?"

"But it isn't a strawberry tea even," said his mother. "Now, look here, children, what have I got here?"

"It's a map—a map of England," said Milly, looking very wise. Milly had just begun to learn geography, and thought she knew all about maps.

"Well, and what happens when father and I look at maps in the summer-time?"

"Why," said Milly, "you and father pack up your things and go away over the sea, and we stay behind with nurse."

"I don't call *that* a nice something," said Olly, standing still again.

"Oh, mother, *are* you going away?" said Milly, hanging round her mother's neck.

"Yes, Milly, and so's father—and so's nurse"—and their mother began to laugh.

"So's nurse?" said Milly and Olly together, and then they stopped and looked at their mother. "Oh, mother, mother, take us too!"

"Why, how should father and I get on, travelling about with a pair of monkeys?" said their mother, catching hold of the two children and lifting them on to her knee; "we should want a cage to keep them in."

"Oh, mother, we'll be *ever* so good! But where are we going? Oh, do take us to the sea!"

"Yes, the sea! the sea!" shouted Olly, careering round the room again; "and we'll have buckets and spades, and we'll paddle and catch crabbies, and wet our clothes just like Cromer. And father'll teach me to swim—he said he would next time."

"No," said Mrs. Norton, for that was the name of Milly and Oliver's mother. "No, we are not going to the sea this summer. We are going to a place mother loves better than the sea, though perhaps you children mayn't like it quite so well. We're going to the mountains. Uncle Richard has lent father and mother his own nice house among the mountains, and we're all going there next week—such a long way in the train, Milly."

"What are mountains?" said Olly, who had scarcely ever seen a hill higher than the church steeple. "They can't be so nice as the sea, mother. Nothing can."

"They're humps, Olly," answered Milly eagerly. "Great big humps of earth, you know; earth with bits of stone sticking in it. And they reach up ever so high, up into the sky. And it takes you a whole day to get up to the top of them, and a whole day to get down again. Doesn't it, mother? Fräulein told me all about mountains in my geography. And some mountains have got snow on their tops all the year, even in summer. Will the mountains we're going to have snow on them?"

"Oh no! The snow mountains are far away over the sea. But these are English mountains, kind, easy mountains, not too high for you and me to climb up, and covered all over with soft green grass and wild flowers, and tiny sheep with black faces."

"And, mother, is there a garden to Uncle Richard's house, and are there any children there to play with?"

"There's a delightful garden, full of roses and strawberries and grapes, and everything else that's nice. And it has a baby river all to itself, that runs down through the middle, so perhaps Olly may have a paddle sometimes, though we aren't going to the sea. And the gardener has got two little children, just about your age, Aunt Mary says; and there are two more at the farm, two dear little girls, who aren't a bit shy, and will like playing with you very much. But who else shall we see there, Milly? Who lives in the mountains too, near Uncle Richard?"

Olly looked puzzled, but Milly thought a minute, and then said quickly, "Aunt Emma—isn't it, mother? Didn't she come here once? I think I remember."

"Yes, she came once, but long ago, when you were quite small. But now we shall see a great deal of her, I hope, for she lives just on the other side of the mountain from Uncle Richard's house, in a pretty old house where I spent a great many happy days when I was small. Greatgrandpapa and grandmamma were alive then. But now Aunt Emma lives there quite alone. Except for one creature, at least—an old grey poll-parrot that chatters away, and behaves as if it were quite sensible and knew all about everything."

"Hasn't she got any pussies, mother?" asked Olly.

"Yes, two, I believe; but they don't get on with polly very well, so they live in the kitchen out of the way."

"I like pussies better than pollies," said Olly gravely.

"Why, what do you know about pollies, old man?"

"Pollies bite—I know they do. There was a polly bited Francis once."

"Well, and pussies scratch," said Milly.

"No, they don't—not if you're nicey to

them," said Olly, who was just then very much in love with a white kitten, and thought there were no creatures so delightful as pussies.

"Well, suppose you don't make up your mind about Aunt Emma's polly till you've seen her," said Mrs. Norton. "Now sit down on the rug there and let us have a talk."

Down squatted the children on the floor opposite their mother, with their little heads full of plans and their eyes as bright as sparks.

"I'll take my cart and horse," began Olly, "and my big ball, and my whistle, and my wheelbarrow, and my spade, and all my books, and the big scrap-book, and——"

"You can't, Olly!" exclaimed Milly. "Nurse could never pack all those up. There'd be no room for our clothes. You can take your whistle, and the top, and the picture-books, and I can take my dolls. That'll be quite enough, won't it, mother?"

"Quite enough," said Mrs. Norton. "If it's fine weather you will hardly want any toys. But now, look here, children," and she

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

DOWN SQUATTED THE CHILDREN ON THE FLOOR.

held up the map. "Shall I show you how we are going to get to the mountains?"

"Oh yes," said Milly; "that'll be like my geography lesson—come, Olly. Now mother 'll teach *you* geography, like Fräulein does me."

"That's lessons," said Olly, with half a pout, "not fun a bit. It's only girls like lessons—boys never do: Jacky doesn't, and Francis doesn't, and I don't."

"Never mind about its being lessons, Olly. Come and see if it isn't interesting," said Mrs. Norton. "Now, Milly, find Willingham."

Willingham was the name of the town where Milly and Oliver lived. It is a little town in Oxfordshire, and if you look long enough on the map you *may* find it, though I won't promise you.

"There it is," said Milly triumphantly, showing it to her mother and Olly.

"Quite right. Now look here," and Mrs. Norton took a pencil out of her pocket and drew a little line along the map. "First of all we shall get into the train and go to a place called—look, Milly."

"Bletchley," said Milly, following where the pencil pointed. "What an ugly name!"

"It's an ugly place," said Mrs. Norton, "so perhaps it doesn't deserve a better name. And after Bletchley—look again, Milly."

"Rug-by," said Milly, reading the names as her mother pointed, "and then Stafford, and then Crewe—what a funny name, mother!—and then Wigan, and then Warrington, and then Lan-caster. Ox-en-holme, Kendal, Wind-er-mere. Oh, mother, what a long way! Why, we've got right to the top of England."

"Stop a bit, Milly, and let me tell you something about these places. First of all we shall get out of the train at Bletchley, and get into another train that will go faster than the first. And it will take us past all kinds of places, some pretty and some ugly, and some big and some small. At Stafford there is an old castle, Milly, where fierce people lived in old days and fought their neighbours. And at Crewe we shall get out and have our dinner. And at Wigan all the trees grow on one side, as if some one had come and given them a push in the night; and at Lancaster there's another old castle, a very famous one, only now they have turned it into a prison, and people are shut up inside it. Then a little way after Lancaster you'll begin to see some mountains, but first you'll see something else—just a little bit of blue sea, with mountains on the other side of it. And then will come Windermere, where we shall get out and drive in a carriage. And we shall drive right into the mountains, Olly, till they stand up all round us with their dear, kind old faces that mother has loved ever since she was a baby."

The children looked up wonderingly at their mother, and they saw her face shining and her eyes as bright as theirs, as if she too was a child going out for a holiday.

"Oh! And, mother," said Olly, "you'll let us take Spot. She can go in my box."

Now Spot was the white kitten, so Milly and mother began to laugh.

"Suppose you go and ask Spot first whether she'd like it, Olly," said Mrs. Norton, patting his sunburnt little face.

CHAPTER II

A JOURNEY NORTH

MILLY and Oliver lived at Willingham, a little town in Oxfordshire, as I have already told you. Their father was a doctor, and they lived in an old-fashioned house, in a street, with a long, shady garden stretching away behind it. Milly and Oliver loved their father, and whenever he put his brown face inside the nursery door, two pairs of little feet went running to meet him, and two pairs of little hands pulled him eagerly into the room. But they saw him very seldom; whereas their mother was always with them, teaching them their lessons, playing with them in the garden, telling them stories, mending their frocks, tucking them up in their snug little beds at night, sometimes praising them, sometimes scolding them; always loving and looking

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

TWO PAIRS OF LITTLE HANDS PULLED HIM EAGERLY INTO THE ROOM.

after them. Milly and Olly honestly believed that theirs was the best mother in the whole world. Nobody else could find out such nice plays, or tell them such wonderful stories, or dress dolls half so well. Two little neighbours of theirs, Jacky and Francis, had a poor, sick mother who always lay on the sofa and could hardly bear to have her little boys in the room with her. Milly and Oliver were never tired of wondering how Jacky and Francis got on with a mother like that. "How funny, and how dreadful it must be! Poor Jacky and Francis!" It never came into their heads to say "Poor Jacky's mother," too, but then you see they were such little people, and little people have only room in their heads for a very few thoughts at a time.

However, Milly had been away from her mother a good deal lately. About six months before my story begins she had been sent to school, to a kindergarten, as she was taught to call it. And there Milly had learnt all kinds of wonderful things: she had learnt how to make mats out of paper—blue mats, and pink mats, and yellow mats, and red mats; she had learnt how to make a bit of soft clay look like a box, or a stool, or a bird's nest with three clay eggs inside it; she had begun to add up and take away; and, above all, she had begun to learn geography, and Fräulein—for Milly's mistress was a German, and had a German name—was just now teaching her about islands, and lakes, and capes, and peninsulas, and many other things that all little girls have to learn about some time or other, unless they wish to grow up dunces.

As for Milly's looks, I have told you already that she had blue eyes and a turn-up nose and a dear sensible little face. And she had very thick fair hair, that was always tumbling about her eyes and making her look, as nurse told her, like "a yellow owl in an ivy bush." Milly loved most people, except perhaps John the gardener, who was rather cross to the children, and was always calling to them not to walk on the beds and to be sure not to touch any of the fruit or flowers. She loved her father and her mother; she loved Olly with all her whole heart, though he was a tease; she loved her nurse, whom she and Olly called Nana, and who had been with them ever since Milly was born; and she loved Fräulein, and was always begging flowers from her mother that she might take them to school for Fräulein's table. So you see Milly was made up of loving. And she was a thoughtful little girl, too, tidy with her dress, quick and quiet at her lessons, and always ready to sit still with her fairy-book or her doll when mother was busy or tired. But there were two things in which Milly was not at all sensible, in spite of her sensible face. She was much too ready to cry when any little thing went wrong, and she was dreadfully afraid of creatures of all sorts. She was afraid of her father's big dog, she was afraid of the dear brown cow that lived in the field beyond the garden, she was afraid of earwigs. I am even ashamed to say she was afraid of spiders. Once she ran away as if a lion were behind her from a white kitten that pulled her dress with its frolicsome paws to make her play with it; but that, Milly would tell you, was "when I was little," and she was quite sure she was a good deal braver now.

Now, what am I to tell you about Olly?

Olly was just a round ball of fun and mischief. He had brown hair, brown eyes, a brown face, and brown hands. He was always touching and meddling with everything, indoors and out, to see what was inside it, or what it was made of. He liked teasing Milly, he liked his walks, he liked his sleep in the morning, he liked his dinner, he liked his tea, he liked everything in the world, except learning to read, and that he hated. He could only do one thing besides mischief. He could sing all kinds of tunes—quick tunes, slow tunes, sad tunes, and merry tunes. He had been able to sing tunes ever since he was quite a tiny baby, and his father and mother often talked together of how, in about a year, he should be taught to play on the piano, or perhaps on the violin, if he liked it better. You might hear his sharp, shrill little voice singing about the house and the garden all day long. John the gardener called it "squealin'," and told Olly his songs were "capital good" for frightening away the birds.

Now, perhaps, you know a little more about Milly and Olly than you did when I began to tell you about them, and it is time you should hear of what happened to them on that wonderful journey of theirs up to the mountains.

First of all came the packing up. Milly could not make up her mind about her dolls; she had three—Rose, Mattie, and Katie; but Rose's frocks were very dirty, Mattie had a leg broken, and Katie's paint had been all washed off one wet night when Olly left her out on the lawn. Now which of these was the tidiest and most respectable doll to take out on a visit? Milly did not know how to settle it.

"I think, Nana," she said at last to her nurse, who was packing the children's trunk, "I will take Katie. Mother always sends us away when we get white faces to make us look nice and red again; so, perhaps, if I take Katie her colour will come back too, you know."

"Perhaps it will, Miss Milly," said nurse, laughing; "anyhow, you had better give me the doll you want directly, for it is time I packed all the toys now. Now, Master Olly, you know I can't let you take all those things."

For there was Olly dragging along his wheelbarrow heaped up with toys with one hand, and his cart and horse with a box of bricks standing up in it with the other. He would not listen to what Milly said about it, and he would scarcely listen to nurse now.

"I can't do without my toys, Nana. I *must* do mischief if you won't let me take all my toys; I can't help it."

"I haven't got room for half those, Master Olly, and you'll have ever so many new things to play with when we get to Ravensnest."

"There'll be the new children, Olly," said Milly, "and the little rivers and all the funny new flowers."

"Those aren't toys," said Olly, looking ready to cry; "I don't know nothing about them."

"Now," said nurse, making a place in the box, "bring me your bricks and your big ball and your picture-books. There, that's all I can spare you."

"Wait one minute," said Olly, rushing off; and just then Mrs. Norton called nurse away to speak to her in the drawing-room. When nurse came back she saw nobody in the nursery. Milly had gone out in the garden, Olly was nowhere to be seen. And who had shut down the trunk, which was open when she left it? "Me-ow" sounded very softly from somewhere close by.

"Why—Spot! Spot!" called nurse.

"Me-ow, me-ow," came again; a sad, choky

UNIV. OF
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OUT SPRANG SPOT LIKE A FLASH OF LIGHTNING.

little mew, right from the middle of the children's trunk. "Master Olly and his tricks again," said nurse, running to the box and opening it. There, on the top, lay a quantity of frocks that nurse had left folded up on the floor, thrown in anyhow, with some toys scattered among them, and the frocks and toys were all dancing up and down as if they were bewitched. Nurse took out the frocks, and there was the children's collar-box—a large round cardboard-box with a lid—jumping from side to side like a box in a fairy tale; and such dreadful, pitiful little mews coming from the inside. Nurse undid the lid, and out sprang Spot like a flash of lightning, and ran as if she were running for her life out of the door and down the stairs and safe into the kitchen, where she cuddled herself up in a corner of the fender, wishing with all her poor trembling little heart that there were no such things in the world as small boys. And then nurse heard a kind of kicking and scuffling in the china cupboard, and when she opened it there sat Olly doubled up, his brown eyes dancing like Will-o'-the-Wisps and his little white teeth grinning.

"Oh! Nana, she *did* make a funny me-ow! I just said to her, 'Now, Spottie, *wouldn't* you like to go in my box?' and she said, 'Yes'; and I made her such a comfy bed, and then I stuck all those frocks on the top of her to keep her warm. Why did you let her out, Nana?"

"You little mischief," said Nana, "do you know you might have smothered poor little Spot? And look at all these frocks; do you think I have got nothing better to do than to tidy up after your tricks?"

But nurse never knew how to be very hard upon Olly; so all she did was to set him up on a high chair with a picture-book where she could see all he was doing. There was no saying what he might take a fancy to pack up next if she didn't keep an eye on him.

Well, presently all the packing was done, and Milly and Olly had gone to say goodbye to Fräulein, and to Jacky and Francis. Wednesday evening came, and they were to start early on Thursday morning. Olly begged nurse to put him to bed very early, that he might "wake up krick"—"quick" was a word Olly never could say. So to bed he went at half-past six, and his head had scarcely touched the pillow two minutes before he had gone cantering away into dreamland, and was seeing all the sights and hearing all the delicious stories that children do see and hear in dreamland, though they don't always remember them when they wake up. Both Milly and he woke up very early on Thursday morning; and directly his eyes were open Olly jumped out of bed like an indiarubber ball, and began to put on his stockings in a terrible hurry. The noise of his jump woke nurse, and she called out in a sleepy voice: "Get into bed again, Master Olly, directly. It is only just six o'clock, and I can't have you out of bed till seven. You'll only be under my feet and in everybody's way."

"Nana, I won't be in *anybody's* way," exclaimed Olly, running up to her and scrambling on to her bed with his little bare toes half-way into his stockings. "I can't keep still in my bye all such a long time. There's something inside of me, Nana, keeps jumping up and down and won't let me keep still. Now, if I get up, you know, Nana, I can help you."

"Help me, indeed!" said nurse, kissing his little brown face, or as much of it as could be seen through his curls. "A nice helping that would be. Come back to bed, sir, and I'll give you some picture-books till I'm ready to dress you."

So back to bed Master Olly went, sorely against his will, and there he had to stay till nurse and Milly were dressed and the breakfast things laid. Then nurse gave him his bath and dressed him, and put him up to eat his bread and milk while she finished the packing. Olly was always very quiet over his meals, and it was the only time in the day when he was quiet.

Presently up rattled the cab, and down ran the children with their walking things on to see father and John lift the boxes on to the top; and soon they were saying goodbye to Susan the cook and Jenny the housemaid, who were going to stay and take care of the house while they were away; and then crack went the whip, and off they went to the station. On the way they passed Jacky and Francis standing at their gate, and all the children waved their hats and shouted

"Hurrah! hurrah!" At the station nurse kept tight hold of Olly till father had got the tickets and put all the boxes into the train, and then he and Milly were safely lifted up into the railway carriage, and nurse and father and mother came next, with all the bags and shawls and umbrellas.

Such a settling of legs and arms and packages there was; and in the middle of it "whew" went the whistle, and off they went away to the mountains.

But they had a long way to go before they saw any mountains. First of all they had to get to Bletchley, and it took about an hour doing that. And oh! what a lovely morning it was, and how fresh and green the fields looked as the train hurried along past them. Olly and Milly could see hundreds and thousands of moondaisies and buttercups growing among the wet grass, and every now and then came great bushes of wild roses, some pink and some white, and long pools with yellow irises growing along the side; and sometimes the train went rushing through a little village, and they could see the little children trotting along to school with their books and slates tucked under their arms; and sometimes they went along for miles together without seeing anything but the white-and-brown cows in the fields and the great mother-sheep with their fat white lambs beside them. The sun shone so brightly, the buttercups were so yellow, the roses so pink, and the sky so blue, it was like a fairy world. Olly and Milly were always shouting and clapping their hands at something or other, for Milly had grown almost as wild as Olly.

Sh-sh-sh-sh went the train, getting slower and slower, till at last it stopped altogether.

"Bletchley, Bletchley!" shouted Olly, jumping down off the seat.

"No, my boy," said his father, catching hold of him, "we shall stop five more times before we get to Bletchley; so don't be impatient."

But at last came Bletchley, and the children were lifted out into the middle of such a bustle, as it seemed to Milly. There were crowds of people at the station, and they were all pushing backwards and forwards and shouting and talking.

"Keep hold of me, Olly," said Milly, with an anxious little face. "Oh, Nana, don't let him go!"

But nurse held him fast; and very soon they were through the crowd, and father had put them safe into their new train, into a carriage marked "Windermere," which would take them all the way to their journey's end.

"That was like lions and bears, wasn't it, mother?" said Olly, pointing to the crowd in the station, as they went puffing away. Now, "lions and bears" was a favourite game of the children's—a romping game, where everybody ran about and pretended to be somebody else, and where the more people played, and the more they ran and pushed and tumbled about, the funnier it was. And the running, scrambling people at the station did look rather as if they were playing at lions and bears.

And now the children had a long day before them. On rushed the train, past towns and villages and houses and trains. The sun got hotter and hotter, and the children began to get a little tired of looking out of window. Milly asked for a story-book, and was soon very happy reading "Snow-white and Rose-red." She had read it a hundred times before, but that never mattered a bit. Olly came to sit on nurse's knee while she showed him pictures, and so the time passed away. And now the train stopped again, and father lifted Olly on his knee to see a great church far away over the houses, and taught him to say "Lichfield Cathedral." And then came Stafford; and Milly looked out for the castle, and wondered whether the castles in her story-books looked like that, and whether princesses and fairy godmothers and giants ever lived there in old times.

After they had left Stafford Olly began to get tired and fidgety. First he went to sit on his father's knee, then on mother's, then on nurse's—none of them could keep him still, and nothing seemed to amuse him for long together.

"Come and have a sleep, Master Olly," said nurse. "You are just tired and hot. This is a long way for little boys, and we've got ever so far to go yet."

"I'm not sleepy, Nana," said Olly, sitting straight up with a little flushed face and wide-open eyes. "I'm going to keep awake like father."

"Father's going to sleep, then," said Mr. Norton, tucking himself up in a shady corner; "so you go, too, Olly, and see which of us can go quickest."

When Olly had seen his father's eyes tight shut and heard him give just one little snore—it was rather a make-believe snore—he did let nurse draw him on to her knee; and very soon the little gipsy creature was fast asleep, with all his brown curls lying like a soft mat over nurse's arm. Milly, too, shut her eyes and sat very still; she did not mean to go to sleep, but presently she began to think a great many sleepy thoughts: Why did the hedges run so fast? and why did the telegraph wires go up and down as if they were always making curtsies? and was that really mother opposite, or was it Cinderella's fairy godmother? And all of a sudden Milly came bump up against a tall blue mountain that had a face like a man and cried out when she bumped upon it!

"Crewe, I declare!" exclaimed father, jumping up with a start. "Why, Olly and I have been asleep nearly an hour! Wake up, children; it's dinner-time."

Nurse had to shake Olly a great many times before he would open his sleepy eyes, and then he stood up rubbing them as if he would rub them quite away. Father lifted him out and carried him into a big room with a big table in it, all ready for dinner, and hungry people sitting round it. What fun it was having dinner at a station with all the grown-up people! Milly and Olly thought there never was such nice bread and such nice apple tart. Nothing at home ever tasted half so good. And after dinner father took them a little walk up and down the platform, and at last, just as it was time to get into the train again, he bought them a paper full of pictures, called the *Graphic*, that amused Olly for a long way.

But it was a long, long way to Windermere, and poor Milly and Olly began to get very tired. The trees at Wigan did make them laugh a little bit, but they were too tired to think them as funny as they would have thought them in the morning. They are such comical trees! First of all, the smoke from the smoky chimneys at Wigan has made them black and stopped the leaves from growing,

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

WHAT FUN IT WAS HAVING DINNER AT A STATION WITH ALL THE GROWN-UP PEOPLE!

and then the wind has blown them all over on one side, so that they look like ugly little twisted dwarfs, as if some cruel fairy had touched them with her wand. But Olly soon forgot all about them, and he began to wander from one end to the other of the carriage again, scrambling and jumping about, till he gave himself a hard knock against the seat, and that made him begin to cry—poor tired little Olly! Then mother lifted him on to her knee and said to him, very softly, "Are you very tired, Olly? Never mind, poor little man, we shan't be very long now; and we're all tired, darling—father's tired and I'm tired; and look at Milly there—she looks like a little white ghost. Suppose you be brave, and try a little extra hard to be good. Then mother 'll love you an extra bit. And what do you think we shall see soon? Such a lovely bit of blue sea with white ships on it! Just you shut your eyes a little bit till it comes—I'll be sure to tell you."

And sure enough, after Lancaster, mother gave a little cry, and Olly jumped up, and Milly came running over, and there before them lay the dancing, windy blue sea, covered over with little white waves, running and tumbling over each other. And on the other side of it what did the children see?

"Mother, mother! what is it?" cried Olly, pointing with his little brown hand far away; "is it a fairy palace, mother?"

"Perhaps it is, Olly; any way, the hill-fairies live there. For those are the mountains, the beautiful mountains we are going to see."

"But how shall we get across the sea to them?" asked Milly, with a puzzled face.

"This is only a corner of the sea, Milly—a bay. Don't you remember bays in your geography? We can't go across it, but we can go round it, and we shall find the mountains on the other side."

Oh, how fast the train seemed to go now that there was something to look at! Everywhere mountains were beginning to spring up. And when they had said goodbye to the sea the mountains began to grow taller and taller. What had happened to the houses, too? They had all turned white or grey; there was no red one left. And the fields had stone walls instead of hedges; and inside the walls there were small sheep, about as big as the lambs they had seen near Oxford in the morning.

Oxenholme, Kendal, WINDERMERE. How glad the tired children were when the train ran slowly down into Windermere Station, and they could jump out and say goodbye to it for a long, long time! They had to wait a little, till father had found all the boxes and put them in the carriage that was waiting for them, and then in they tumbled, nurse having first wrapped them up in big shawls, for it was evening now and the wind had grown cold. That was a nice drive home among the mountains! How tall and dark and quiet they were! And what was this shining on their left hand, like a white face running beside them and peeping from behind the trees? Why, it was a lake—a great wide lake, with tiny boats upon it, some with white sails and some without.

"Mother! mother! may we go in those boats some day?" shouted Olly in a little, sharp, tired voice, and his mother smiled at him and said, "Yes, very likely."

How happy mother looked! She knew all the mountains like old friends, she could tell all their names; and every now and then, when they came to a house, she and father would begin to talk about the people who lived in it just as if they were talking about people they knew quite well. And now came a little town—the town of Wanwick, mother called it—right among the mountains, with a river running round it and a tall church spire. It began to get darker and darker, and the trees hung down over the road, so that the children could hardly see. On they went, and Olly was very nearly asleep again, when the carriage began to crunch over gravel, and then it stopped, and father called out, "Here we are, children; here we are at Ravensnest."

And out they all jumped. What were those bright lights shining? Olly and Milly hardly knew where they were going as nurse took them in and one of Uncle Richard's servants showed them the way upstairs to the nursery. Such a nice nursery, with candles lit and a little fire burning, two bowls of hot bread and milk on the table, and in the corner two little white beds, as soft and fresh as nests! In twenty minutes Olly was in one of these little white beds and Milly in the other. And you may guess whether they were long about going to sleep.

CHAPTER III

RAVENSNEST

"POOR little souls! How late they are sleeping! They must have been tired last night."

So said nurse at eight o'clock, when she came back into the nursery from a journey to the kitchen after the breakfast things and found the children still fast asleep—so fast that it looked as if they meant to go on sleeping till dinner-time.

"Milly!" she called softly, shaking her very gently; "Milly, it's breakfast-time; wake up!"

Milly began to move about, and muttered something about "whistles" and "hedges" in her sleep.

Then nurse gave her another little shake, and at last Milly's eyes did try very hard to open. "What is it? What do you want, Nana? Where are we? Oh, I know!"

And up sprang Milly in a second and ran to the window, her sleepy eyes wide open at last. "Yes, there they are! Come and look, Nana! There, past those trees—don't you see the mountains? And there is father walking about; and oh! do look at those roses over there. Dress me quick—dress me quick, please, dear Nana."

Thump! bump! and there was Olly out of bed, sitting on the floor rubbing his eyes. Olly used always to jump out of bed half asleep, and then sit a long time on the floor waking up. Nurse and Milly always left him alone till he was quite woke up. It made him cross if you began to talk to him too soon.

"Milly," said Olly presently, in a sleepy voice, "I'm going right up the mountains after breakfast. Aren't you?"

"Wait till you see them, Master Olly," said nurse, taking him up and kissing him; "perhaps your little legs won't find it quite so easy to climb up the mountains as you think."

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

NURSE AND MILLY ALWAYS LEFT HIM ALONE TILL HE WAS QUITE WOKE UP.

"I can climb up three, four, six, seven mountains," said Olly stoutly; "mountains aren't a bit hard. Mother says they're meant to climb up."

"Well, I suppose it's like going up stairs a long way," said Milly thoughtfully, pulling on her stockings. "You didn't like going up the stairs in Auntie Margaret's house, Olly."

Auntie Margaret's house was a tall London house, with ever so many stairs. The children, when they were staying there, were put to sleep at the top, and Olly used to sit down on the stairs and pout and grumble every time they had to go up.

But Olly shook his obstinate little head.

"I don't believe it's a bit like going up stairs."

However, as they couldn't know what it was like before they tried, nurse told them it was no good talking about it. So they hurried on with their dressing; and presently there stood as fresh a pair of morning children as any one could wish to see, with rosy cheeks, and smooth hair, and clean print frocks, for Olly was still in frocks; though when the winter came mother said she was going to put him into knickerbockers.

And then nurse took them each by the hand and led them through some long passages, down a pretty staircase, and through a swing door, into what looked like a great flagged kitchen, only there was no fireplace in it. The real kitchen opened out of it at one side, and through the door came a smell of coffee and toast that made the children feel as hungry as little hunters. But their own room was straight in front, across the kitchen without a fireplace—a tiny room with one large window hung round with roses and looking out on to a green lawn.

"Nana, isn't it pretty? Nana, I think it's lovely!" said Milly, looking out and clapping her hands. And it *was* a pretty garden they could see from the window. An up-and-down garden, with beds full of bright flowers, and grass which was nearly all moss, and so soft that no cushion could be softer. In the distance they could hear a little splish-splash among the trees, which came, Milly supposed, from the river mother had told them about; while, reaching up all round the house, so that they could not see the top of it from the window, was the green wild mountain itself—

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

"I CAN ROW, FATHER SAID I MIGHT."

the mountain of Brownholme, under which Uncle Richard's house was built.

The children hurried through their breakfast, and then nurse covered them up with garden pinafores and took them to the dining-room to find father and mother. Mr. and Mrs. Norton were reading letters when the children's curly heads appeared at the open door, and Mrs. Norton was just saying to her husband:

"Aunt Emma sends a few lines just to welcome us, and to say that she can't come over to us to-day, but will we all come over to her to-morrow and have early dinner, and perhaps a row afterwards——"

"Oh, a row, mother, a row!" shouted Olly, clambering on to his mother's knee and half-strangling her with his strong little arms; "I can row, father said I might. Are we going to-day?"

"No, to-morrow, Olly, when we've seen a little bit of Ravensnest first. Which of you remembers Aunt Emma, I wonder?"

"I remember her," said Milly, nodding her head wisely; "she had a white cap, and she told me stories. But I don't quite remember her face, mother—not *quite.*"

"I don't remember her, not one bit," said Olly. "Mother, does she keep saying, 'Don't do that'; 'Go upstairs, naughty boys,' like Jacky's aunt does?"

For the children's playfellows, Jacky and Francis, had an aunt living with them whom Milly and Olly couldn't bear. They believed that she couldn't say anything else except "Don't!" and "Go upstairs!" and they were always in dread lest they should come across an aunt like her.

"She's the dearest aunt in the whole world," said mother, "and she never says 'Don't,' except when she's obliged, but when she does say it little boys have to mind. When I was a little girl I thought there was nobody like Aunt Emma, nobody who could make such plans or tell such splendid stories."

"And, mother, can't she cut out card dolls?" asked Milly. "Don't you know those beautiful card dolls you have in your drawer at home—didn't Aunt Emma make them?"

"Yes, of course she did. She made me a whole family once for my birthday, a father and a mother, and two little girls and two little boys. And each of the children had two paper dresses and two hats, one for best and one for everyday—and the mother had a white evening dress trimmed with red, and a hat and a bonnet."

"I know, mother! they're all in your drawer at home, only one of the little boys has his head broken off. Do you think Aunt Emma would make me a set if I asked her?"

"I can't say, Milly. But I believe Aunt Emma's fingers are just as quick as ever they were. Now, children, father says he will take you out while I go and speak to cook. Olly, how do you think we're going to get any meat for you and Milly here? There are no shops on the mountains."

"Then we'll eat fisses—little fisses like those!" cried Olly, pointing to a plate of tiny red-spotted fish that father and mother had been having for breakfast.

"Thank you, Olly," said Mr. Norton, laughing; "it would cost a good deal to keep you in trout, sir. I think we'll try for some plain mutton for you, even if we have to catch the sheep on the mountains ourselves. But now come along till mother is ready, and I'll show you the river where those little fishes lived."

Out ran the children, ready to go anywhere and see anything in this beautiful new place, which seemed to them a palace of wonders. And presently they were skipping over the soft green grass, each holding one of father's hands, and chattering away to him as if their little tongues would never stop. What a hot day it was going to be! The sky overhead was deep blue, with scarcely a cloud, they could hear nothing in the still air but the sleepy cooing of the doves in the trees by the gate, and the trees and flowers all looked as if they were going to sleep in the heat.

"Father, why did that old gentleman at Willingham last week tell mother that it always rained in the mountains?" asked Milly, looking up at the blue sky.

"Well, Milly, I'm afraid you'll find out before you go home that it does know how to rain here. Sometimes it rains and rains as if the sky were coming down and all the world were going to turn into water. But never mind about that now—it isn't going to rain to-day."

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

EACH HOLDING ONE OF FATHER'S HANDS, AND CHATTERING AWAY TO HIM.

Down they went through the garden, across the road, and into a field on the other side of it—a beautiful hayfield full of flowers, with just a narrow little path through it where the children and Mr. Norton could walk one behind another. And at the end of the path what do you think they found? Why, a chattering sparkling river, running along over hundreds and thousands of brown and green pebbles so fast that it seemed to be trying to catch the birds as they skimmed across it. The children had never seen a river like this before, where you could see right to the very bottom and count the stones there if you liked, and which behaved like a river at play, scrambling and dancing and rushing along as if it were out for a holiday, like the children themselves.

"What do you think of that for a river, children?" said Mr. Norton. "Very early this morning, when you little sleepyheads were in bed, I got up and came down here, and had my bath over there, look—in that nice brown pool under the tree."

"Oh, father!" cried both the children, dancing round him. "Let us have our baths in the river too. Do ask nurse. We can have our bathing things on that we had at the sea, and you can come too and teach us to swim."

"Well, just once perhaps, if mother says yes, and it's very warm weather, and you get up very *very* early. But you won't like it quite as much as you think. Rivers are very cold to bathe in, and those pretty stones at the bottom won't feel at all nice to your little toes."

"Oh, but, father," interrupted Milly, "we could put on our sand-shoes——"

"And wouldn't we splash!" said Olly. "Nurse won't let us splash in our bath, father, she says it makes a mess. I'm sure it doesn't make a *great* mess."

"What do you know about it, shrimp?" said Mr. Norton; "you don't have to tidy up. Hush, isn't that mother calling? Let's go and fetch her, and then we'll go and see Uncle Richard's farm, where the milk you had for breakfast came from. There are three children there, Milly, besides cows and pigs, and ducks and chickens."

Back ran Milly and Olly; and there was

mother watching for them with a basket on her arm which had already got some roses lying in it.

"Oh, mother! where did you get those roses?" cried Milly.

"Wheeler, the gardener, gave them to me. And now suppose we go first of all to see Mrs. Wheeler and gardener's two little children. They live in that cottage over there, and the two little ones have just been peeping over the wall to try and get a look at you."

Up clambered Milly and Olly along a steep path that seemed to take them up into the mountain, when suddenly they turned, and there was another river, but such a tiny river —Milly could almost jump across it, and it was tumbling and leaping down the rocks on its way to the big river which they had just seen, as if it were a little child hurrying to its mother.

"Why, mother, what a lot of rivers!" said Olly, running on to a little bridge that had been built across the little stream, and looking over.

"Just to begin with," said Mrs. Norton.

"You'll see plenty more before you've done. But I can't have you calling this a river, Olly. These baby rivers are called becks in Westmoreland—some of the big ones, too, indeed."

On the other side of the little bridge was the gardener's cottage, and in front of the door stood two funny fair-haired little children with their fingers in their mouths, staring at Milly and Olly. One was a little girl who was really about Milly's age, though she looked much younger, and the other was a very shy small boy, with blue eyes and straggling yellow hair, and a face that might have been pretty if you could have seen it properly. But Charlie seemed to have made up his mind that nobody ever should see it properly. However often his mother might wash him, and she was a tidy woman, who liked to see her children look clean and nice, Charlie was always black. His face was black, his hands were black, his pinafore was sure to be covered with black marks ten minutes after he had put it on. Do what you would to him, it was no use, Charlie always looked as if he had just come out of the coal-hole.

"Well, Bessie," said Mrs. Norton to the little girl, "is your mother in?"

"Naw," said Bessie, without taking her fingers out of her mouth.

"Oh, I'm sorry for that. Do you know when she's likely to be in?"

"Naw," said Bessie again, beginning to eat her pinafore as well as her fingers. Meanwhile Charlie had been creeping behind Bessie to get out of Olly's way; for Olly, who always wanted to make friends, was trying to shake hands with him, and Charlie was dreadfully afraid that he wanted to kiss him too.

"What a pity!" said Mrs. Norton; "I wanted to ask her a question. Come away, Olly, and don't tease Charlie if he doesn't want to shake hands. Can you remember, Bessie, to tell your mother that I came to see her?"

"Yis," said Bessie.

"And can you remember, too, to ask her if she will let you and Charlie come down to tea with Miss Milly and Master Olly this afternoon, at five o'clock?"

"Yis," said Bessie, getting shyer and shyer, and eating up her pinafore faster than ever.

"Goodbye then," said Mrs. Norton.

"Goodbye, Bessie," said Milly softly, taking her hand.

Bessie stared at her, but didn't say anything.

Olly, having quite failed in shaking hands, was now trying to kiss Charlie; but Charlie wouldn't have it at all, and every time Olly came near, Charlie pushed him away with his little fists. This made Olly rather cross, and he began to try with all his strength to make Charlie kiss him, when suddenly Charlie got away from him, and running to a pile of logs of wood which was lying in the yard, he climbed up the logs like a little squirrel, and was soon at the top of the heap, looking down on Olly, who was very much astonished.

"Mother, *do* let me climb up too!" entreated Olly, as Mrs. Norton took his hand to lead him away. "I want to climb up krick like that! Oh, do let me try!"

"No, no, Olly! come along. We shall never get to the farm if you stay climbing here. And you wouldn't find it as easy as Charlie does, I can tell you."

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

HE CLIMBED UP THE LOGS LIKE A LITTLE SQUIRREL.

"Why, I'm bigger than Charlie," said Olly, pouting, as they walked away.

"But you haven't got such stout legs; and, besides, Charlie is always out of doors all day long, climbing and poking about. I daresay he can do outdoor things better than you can. You're a little town boy, you know."

"Charlie's got a black face," said Olly, who was not at all pleased that Charlie, who was smaller than he was, and dirty besides, could do anything better than he could.

"Well, you see, he hasn't got a Nana always looking after him, as you have."

"Hasn't he got *any* Nana?" asked Olly, looking as if he didn't understand how there could be little children without Nanas.

"He hasn't got any nurse but his mother, and Mrs. Wheeler has a great deal else to do than looking after him. What would you be like, do you think, Olly, if I had to do all the housework, and cook the dinner, and mind the baby, and there was no nurse to wash your face and hands for you?"

"I should get just like Shockheaded Peter," said Olly, shaking his head gravely at the idea. Shockheaded Peter was a dirty little boy in one of Olly's picture-books; but I am sure you must have heard about him already, and must have seen the picture of him with his bushy hair and his terrible long nails like birds' claws. Olly was never tired of hearing about him, and about all the other children in that picture-book.

"What a funny little girl Bessie is, mother!" said Milly. "Do they always say *Naw* and *Yis* in this country, instead of saying No and Yes, like we do?"

"Well, most of the people that live here do," said Mrs. Norton. "Their way of talking sounds odd and queer at first, Milly, but when you get used to it you will like it as I do, because it seems like a part of the mountains."

All this time they had been climbing up a steep path behind the gardener's house, and now Mr. Norton opened a door in a high wall and let the children into a beautiful kitchen-garden made on the mountain side, so that when they looked down from the gate they could see the chimneys of Ravens-nest just below them. Inside there were all kinds of fruit and vegetables, but gooseberry bushes and the strawberries had nothing but green gooseberries and white strawberries to show, to Olly's great disappointment.

"Why aren't the strawberries red, mother?" he asked in a discontented voice, as if it must be somebody's fault that they weren't red. "Ours at home were ripe."

"Well, Olly, I suppose the strawberries know best. All I can tell you is that things always get ripe here later than at Willingham. Their summer begins a little later than ours does, so everything gets pushed on a little. But there will be plenty by and by. And suppose just now, instead of looking at the strawberries, you give just one look at the mountains. Count how many you can see all round."

"One, two, three, five," counted Olly. "What great big humps! Should we be able to touch the sky if we got up to the top of that one, mother?" and he pointed to a great blue mountain where the clouds seemed to be resting on the top.

"Well, if you were up there just now you would be all among the clouds, and it would seem like a white fog all round you. So you would be touching the clouds, at any rate."

Olly opened his eyes very wide at the idea of touching the clouds.

"Why, mother, we can't touch the clouds at home."

"That comes of living in a country as flat as a pancake," said Mr. Norton. "Just you wait till we can buy a tame mountain and carry it to Willingham with us. Then we'll put it down in the middle of the garden, and the clouds will come down to sit on the top of it just as they do here. But now, who can scramble over that gate?"

For the gate at the other end of the garden was locked, and as the gardener could not be found, everybody had to scramble over, mother included. However, Mr. Norton helped them all over, and then they found themselves on a path running along the green mountain side. On they went, through pretty bits of steep hayfields, where the grass seemed all clover and moondaisies, till presently they came upon a small hunched-up house, with a number of sheds on one side of it and a kitchen garden in front.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

EVERYBODY HAD TO SCRAMBLE OVER, MOTHER INCLUDED.

This was Uncle Richard's farm; a very tiny farm, where a man called John Backhouse lived, with his wife and two little girls and a baby-boy. Except just in the haytime, John Backhouse had no men to help him, and he and his wife had to do all the work, to look after the sheep, and the cows, the pigs, the horse, and the chickens, to manage the garden and the hayfield, and to take the butter and the milk to the people who wanted to buy it. When their children grew up and were able to help, Backhouse and his wife would be able to do it all very well; but just now, when they were still quite small, it was very hard work; it was all the farmer and his wife could do to make enough to keep themselves and their children fed and clothed.

Milly and Olly were very anxious to see the farmer's children, and looked out for them in the garden as they walked up to the house, but there were no signs of them. The door was opened by Mrs. Backhouse, the farmer's wife, who held a fair-haired baby in her arms sucking a great crust of brown bread; and when Mr. and Mrs. Norton had shaken hands with her, "I'm sure, ma'am, I'm very pleased to see you here," said Mrs. Backhouse. "John told me you were come" (only Mrs. Backhouse said "coom"), "and Becky and Tiza went down with their father when he took the milk this morning, hoping they would catch a sight of your children. They have been just wild to see them, but I told them they weren't likely to be up at that time in the morning."

"Where are they now?" asked Mrs. Norton. "Mine have been looking out for them as we came along."

"Well, ma'am, I can't say, unless they are in the cherry-tree. Becky! Tiza!"

A faint "Yis" came from the other end of the garden, but still Milly and Olly could see nothing but a big cherry-tree growing where the voice seemed to come from.

"You go along that path, missy, and call again. You'll be sure to find them," said Mrs. Backhouse, pointing to the tree. "And won't you come in, ma'am, and rest a bit? You'll be maybe tired with walking this hot day."

So Mr. and Mrs. Norton went into the farm-

TWO LITTLE GIRLS PERCHED UP ON ONE OF THE CHERRY-TREE BRANCHES.

house and the children went hand-in-hand down the garden, looking for Becky and Tiza.

Suddenly, as they came close to the cherry-tree, they heard a laugh and a little scuffling, and looking up, what should they see but two little girls perched up on one of the cherry-tree branches, one of them sewing, the other nursing a baby kitten. Both of them had coloured print bonnets, but the smaller had taken hers off and was rolling the kitten up in it. The little girl sewing had a sensible, sober face; as for the other, she could not have looked sober if she had tried for a week of Sundays. It made you laugh only to look at Tiza. From the top of her curly head to the soles of her skipping little feet she was the sauciest, merriest, noisiest creature. It was she who was always playing tricks on the cows and the horse and the big sheep-dogs, who liked nothing so well as teasing Becky and dressing up the kittens, and who was always tumbling into the milkpail, or rolling downstairs, or losing herself in the woods, without somehow ever coming to any harm. If she and Olly had been left alone in the world together they *must* have come to a bad end, but luckily, each of them had wiser people to take care of them.

"Becky," said Milly shyly, looking up into the tree, "will you come down and say how do you do to us?"

Becky stuck her needle in her work and scrambled down with a red, shy face to shake hands; but Tiza, instead of coming down, only climbed a little higher, and peeped at the others between the branches.

"We came down to the house when fayther took the milk this morning," said Becky. "We thought maybe we'd see you in the garden. Only Tiza said she'd run away if she did see you."

"Why doesn't Tiza come down?" asked Olly, looking hard up into the tree. "I want to see her."

Thump! What was that rattling down on Olly's head? He looked down at his feet very much astonished, and saw a bunch of green cherries which Tiza had just thrown at him.

"Throw some more! Throw some more!"

he cried out, and Tiza began to pelt him fast, while Olly ran here and there picking them up, and every now and then trying to throw them back at Tiza; but she was too high up for him to reach, and they only came rattling about his head again.

"She won't come down," said Becky, looking up at her sister. "Maybe she won't speak to you for two or three days. And if you run after her she hides in such queer places you can never find her."

"But mother wants you and her to come to tea with us this afternoon," said Milly; "won't Tiza come?"

"I suppose mother 'll make her," said Becky; "but she doesn't like it. Have you been on the fell?"

Milly looked puzzled. "Do you mean on the mountain? No, not yet. We're going to-morrow when we go to Aunt Emma's. But we've been to the river with father."

"Did you go over the stepping-stones?"

"No," said Milly, "I don't know what they are. Can we go this evening after tea?"

"Oh yes," said Becky, "they're just close by your house. Does your mother let you go in the water?"

Now Becky said a great many of these words very funnily, so that Milly could hardly understand her. She said "doos" and "oop," and "knaw," and "jist," and "la-ike," but it sounded quite pretty from her soft little mouth, and Milly thought she had a very nice way of talking.

"No, mother doesn't let us go in the water here—at least, not unless it's very warm. We paddle when we go to the sea, and some day father says we may have our bath in the river if it's very fine."

"We never have a bath in the river," said Becky, looking very much astonished at the idea.

"Do you have your bath in the nursery, like we do?" asked Milly.

"We haven't got a nursery," said Becky, staring at her; "mother puts us in the toob on Saturday nights. I don't mind it, but Tiza doesn't like it a bit. Sometimes she hides when it's Saturday night, so that mother can't find her till it's too late."

"Don't you have a bath except on Saturday?" said Milly. "Olly and I have one every morning. Mother says we should get like Shockheaded Peter if we didn't."

"I don't know about him," said Becky, shaking her head.

"He's a little boy in a picture-book. I'll show him you when you come to tea. But there's mother calling. Come along, Olly; Tiza won't come down, Becky says."

"She's a very rude girl," said Olly, who was rather hot and tired with his game, and didn't think it was all fun that Tiza should always hit him and he should never be able to hit Tiza. "I won't sit next her when she comes to tea with us."

"Tiza's only in fun," said Becky; "she's always like that. Tiza, are you coming down? I am going to get baby out; I heard him crying just now."

"May you take baby out all by yourself?" asked Milly.

"Why, I always take him out; and I put him to sleep at nights; and mother says he won't go to sleep for anybody as quick as for me," said Becky proudly.

Milly felt a good deal puzzled. It *must* be funny to have no Nana.

"Will you and he," said Becky, pointing to Olly, "come up this afternoon and help us call the cows?"

"If we may," said Milly; "who calls them?"

"Tiza and I," answered Becky; "when I'm a big girl I shall learn how to milk, but faythor says I'm too little yet."

"I wish I lived at a farm," said Milly disconsolately.

Becky didn't quite know what to say to this, so she began to call Tiza again.

"Swish!" went something past them as quick as lightning. It was Tiza running to the house. Olly set out to run after her as fast as he could run, but he came bang up against his mother standing at the farm-house door, just as Tiza got safely in and was seen no more.

"Ah, you won't catch Tiza, master," said Mrs. Backhouse, patting his head; "she's a rough girl, always at some tricks or other; we think she ought to have been a boy, really."

"Mother, isn't Becky very nice?" said

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

HE CAME BANG UP AGAINST HIS MOTHER.

Milly, as they walked away. "Her mother lets her do such a lot of things—nurse the baby, and call the cows, and make pinafores. Oh, I wish father was a farmer."

"Well, it's not a bad kind of life when the sun shines and everything is going right," said Mrs. Norton, "but I think you had better wait a little bit till the rain comes before you quite make up your mind about it, Milly."

But Milly was quite sure she knew enough about it already to make up her mind, and all the way home she kept saying to herself, "If I could only turn into a little farmer's girl! Why don't people have fairy godmothers now like Cinderella?"

CHAPTER IV

OUT ON THE HILLS

MILLY and Olly and the four little Westmoreland children had a very pleasant tea together in the afternoon of the Nortons' first day at Ravensnest. Bessie and Charlie certainly didn't talk much, but Tiza, when once her mother had made her come, thought proper to get rid of a great deal of her shyness and to chatter and romp so much that they quite fell in love with her and could not be persuaded to go anywhere or do anything without her. Nurse would not let Milly and Olly go to call the cows, though she promised they should some other day, but she took the whole party down to the stepping-stones after tea, and great fun it was to see Becky and Tiza running over the stepping-stones and jumping from one stone to another

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

BECKY AND TIZA JUMPING FROM ONE STONE TO ANOTHER LIKE LITTLE FAWNS.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

like little fawns. Milly and Olly wanted sorely to go too, but there was no persuading Nana to let them go without their father to fish them out if they tumbled in, so they had to content themselves with dangling their legs over the first stepping-stone and watching the others. But perhaps you don't quite know what stepping-stones are? They are large high stones with flat tops which people put in, a little way apart from each other, right across a river, so that by stepping from one to the other you can cross to the opposite side. Of course they only do for little rivers, where the water isn't very deep. And they don't always do even there. Sometimes in the river Thora, where Milly and Olly's stepping-stones were, when it rained very much the water rose so high that it dashed right over the stepping-stones and nobody could go across. Milly and Olly saw the stepping-stones covered with water once or twice while they were at Ravensnest, but the first evening they saw them the river was very low and the stones stood up high and dry out of the water. Milly thought that stepping-stones were much nicer than bridges and that it was the most amusing and interesting way of getting across a river that she knew. But then Milly was inclined to think everything wonderful and interesting at Ravensnest—from the tall mountains that seemed to shut them in all around like a wall down to the tiny, gleaming wild strawberries that were just beginning to show their little scarlet balls on the banks in the Ravensnest woods. Both she and Olly went to bed after their first day at Ravensnest with their little hearts full of happiness and their little heads full of plans. To-morrow they were to go to Aunt Emma's, and perhaps the day after that father would take them to bathe in the river and nurse would let them go and help Becky and Tiza call the cows. Holidays *were* nice; still, geography lessons were nice too sometimes, thought Milly sleepily, just as she was slipping, slipping away into dreamland, and in her dreams her faithful little thoughts went back lovingly to Fräulein's kind old face and to the capes and islands and seas she had been learning about a week ago.

The next morning Mr. and Mrs. Norton were busy indoors till about twelve o'clock, and the children wandered about the garden with nurse, finding out many new nooks and corners, especially a delightful steep path which led up and up into the woods till at last it took the children to a little brown summer-house at the top, where they could sit and look over the trees below away to the river and the hayfields and the mountains. And between the stones and this path grew the prettiest wild strawberries—only, as Milly said, it was not much good looking for them yet, for there were so few red ones you could scarcely get enough to taste what they were like. But in a week or two she and Olly planned that they would take up a basket with some green leaves in it and gather a lot for father and mother—enough for regular dessert—and some wild raspberries too, for these also grew in the wood, to the great delight of the children, who had never seen any before. They began to feel presently as if it would be nothing very extraordinary to find trees covered with barley-sugar or jam-tarts in this wonderful wood. And as for the flowers Milly gathered for her mother, they were a sight to see—moondaisies and meadow-sweet, wild roses and ragged robins, and bright bits of rhododendron. For both the woods and the garden at Ravensnest were full of rhododendrons of all colours, pink and red and white and flame colour; and Milly and Olly amused themselves with making up bunches of flowers with as many different colours in them as they could find. There were no rhododendrons at Willingham, and the children thought them the loveliest, gayest things they had ever seen.

But at last twelve o'clock came. Nurse tidied the children, gave them some biscuits and milk, and then sent them to the drawing-room to find father and mother. Only Mrs. Norton was there, but she said there was no need to wait for father, as he was out already and would meet them on the way. They were to go straight over the mountain instead of walking round by the road, which would have taken much longer. So off they set, Olly skipping and chattering as he always did, while Milly stuck close to her mother, telling her every now and then, when Olly left off talking, about their morning in the wood, the flowers they had gathered and the strawberries they had found. At the top of the garden was a little gate, and beside the gate stood Bessie and Charlie, who had really been watching for the children all the morning, though they didn't dare to come into the garden without leave.

"Bessie, we are going to Aunt Emma's," said Milly, running up to them. "Where are you and Charlie going to?"

"Nawhere," said Bessie, who, as usual, had her pinafore in her mouth, and never said more than one word at a time if she could help it.

"Nowhere! What do you do all the morning, Bessie?"

"I doan't know," said Bessie, gravely looking up at her. "Sometimes I mind the baby."

"Do you mind the baby, too? Dear, dear! And what does Charlie do?"

"Nawthing," said Bessie again. "He only makes himself dirty."

"Don't you go to school ever?"

"No, but mother's going to send us," said Bessie, whose big eyes grew round and frightened at the idea, as if it was a dreadful prospect. "Are you going to be away for all day?"

"Yes; we shan't be back till quite evening, mother says. Here she is. Goodbye, Bessie, goodbye, Charlie. Will you come and play with us to-morrow morning?"

Bessie nodded, but Charlie ran off without answering, for he saw Olly coming and was afraid he might want to kiss him. On the other side of the gate they had to begin to climb up a steep bit of soft green grass, and very hard work it was. After quite a little way the children began to puff and pant like two little steam-engines.

"It *is* a little bit like going up stairs, don't you think, Olly?" said Milly, sitting down by her mother on a flat bit of grey stone.

"No, it isn't a bit like going up stairs," said Olly, shaking his head, for Olly always liked contradicting Milly if he could. "It's like—it's like—walking up a house!"

Suddenly they heard far above them a shout of "Hullo!" Both the children started up and looked about them. It was like father's voice, but they couldn't see him anywhere.

"Where are you, father?"

"Hullo!" again. And this time it sounded

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

THE TWO OF THEM ROLLED AWAY TOGETHER.

much nearer to them. Where could it be? The children began to run about and look behind the bushes and the rocks, till all of a sudden, just as Milly got near a big rock, out jumped Mr. Norton from behind it with a great shout and began to run after her. Away ran Milly and Olly as fast as their small feet could carry them, up and down, up and down, till at last there came a steep place, one of Milly's feet tripped up—down she went, rolling over and over, down came Olly on the top of her, and the two of them rolled away together till they stopped at the bottom of the steep place, all mixed up in a heap of legs and arms and hats and pinafores.

"Here's a boy and girl tied up in a knot," said Mr. Norton, scrambling down after them and lifting them up. "There's no harm done, is there?"

"I've got a bump on my arm," said Milly, turning up her sleeve.

"And I've got a scratch on my nose," said Olly, rubbing it.

"That's not much for a nice tumble like that," said Mr. Norton. "You wouldn't mind another, would you, Milly?"

"Not a bit," said Milly, merrily skipping along beside him. "Hide again, father."

"Another day—not now, for we want to get to Aunt Emma's. But to-morrow, if you like, we'll come up here and have a capital game. Only we must choose a nice dry place where there are no bogs."

"What are bogs?" asked Olly.

"Wet places where your feet go sinking deeper and deeper into the mud and you can't find any stiff, firm bit to stand on. Sometimes people sink down and down into a bog till the mud comes right over their head and face and chokes them, but we haven't got any bogs as bad as that here. Now, children, step along in front. Very soon we shall get to the top of the mountain, and then we shall see wonderful things on the other side."

So Milly and Olly ran on, pushing their way through the great tall fern or scampering over the short green grass where the little mountain sheep were nibbling, and where a beautiful creeping moss grew all over the ground, which mother told Milly was called "stags'-horn moss," because its little green branches were so like stags' horns.

"Now look, children," shouted their father to them from behind; "here we are at the top."

And then all of a sudden, instead of only the green mountain and the sheep, they could see far away on the other side of the mountain. There, all round them, were numbers of other mountains, and below, at their feet, were houses and trees and fields, while straight in front lay a great big blue lake stretching away ever so far till it seemed to be lost in the sky.

"Look, look, mother!" cried Milly, clapping her hands; "there's Windermere Lake, the lake we saw when we were coming from the station. Look at that steamer with all the people on board! What funny little black people! And oh, mother, look at that little boat over there! How can people go out in such a weeny boat as that?"

"It isn't such a weeny boat, Milly. It only looks so small because it's such a long way off. When father and I take you and Olly on the lake we shall go in a boat just like that. And now, instead of looking so far away, look just down here below you and tell me what you see."

"Some chimneys, and some trees, and some smoke, ever so far down," shouted the children. "Is it a house, mother?"

"That's Aunt Emma's house, the old house where I used to come and stay when I was a little girl and when your dear greatgrandfather and greatgrandmother were alive. I used to think it the nicest place in the world."

"Were you a very little girl, mother, and were you ever naughty?" asked Milly, slipping her little hand into her mother's and beginning to feel rather tired with her long walk.

"I'm afraid I was very often naughty, Milly. I used to get into great rages and scream till everybody was quite tired out. But Aunt Emma was very good to me and took a great deal of pains to cure me of going into rages. Besides, it always did naughty children good to live in the same house with greatgrandmamma, and so after a while I got better. Take care how you go, children; it's very steep just here and you might soon tumble over on your noses. Olly, take care! take care! where *are* you going?"

Where, indeed, was Olly going? Just the moment before the little man had spied a

CALIFORNIA

WITH ONE GRIP HE GOT HOLD OF OLLY UNDER HIS ARM.

lovely flower growing a little way off the path in the middle of some bright yellow-green moss. And without thinking of anything but getting it, off he rushed. But oh! splish, splash, splish, down went Olly's feet, up splashed the muddy water, and there was Olly stuck in a bog!

"Father, pull me out, pull me out!" cried the little boy in terror as he felt his feet stuck fast. But almost before he could speak there was father close beside him, standing on a round little hump of dry grass which was sticking up out of the bog, and with one grip he got hold of Olly under his arm, and then jump! on to another little hump of grass—jump! on to another—and there they were safe on the path again.

"Oh, you black boy!" cried father and mother and Milly all together. Was there ever such a little object? All his nice clean holland frock was splashed with black mud, and what had happened to his stockings?

"I've got mud-stockings on," shouted Olly, capering about and pointing to his legs, which were caked with mud up to his knees.

"You're a nice respectable boy to take out to dinner," said Mrs. Norton. "I think we'll leave you on the mountain to have dinner with the sheep."

"Oh no, father," pleaded Milly, taking Olly fast by the hand. "We can wash him at Aunt Emma's, you know."

"Don't go too close to him, Milly!" exclaimed Mrs. Norton, "or you'll get as black as he is. We shall have to put him under the pump at Aunt Emma's, that's quite certain. But there's nothing to wash him with here, so he must just go as he is for a bit. Now, Olly, run along and your feet will soon dry. Father's going first; you go next, just where he goes; I'm coming after you, and Milly shall come last. Perhaps in that way we shall get you down safe."

"Oh, but, mother, look at my flower!" said Olly, holding it up triumphantly. "Isn't it a beauty?"

"Shall I tell you what it's called, Olly? It's called a butterwort, and it always grows in boggy places; I wouldn't advise you to go after one again without asking father first."

It was a very different thing going down

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

"COME, OLLY, DON'T BE SHY."

the mountain from climbing up it. It seemed only a few minutes before they had got almost to the bottom, and there was a gate leading into a road, and a little village of white houses in front of them. They walked up the road a little way, and then father opened a big gate and let them into a beautiful garden full of rhododendrons, like the Ravensnest garden. And who was this walking down the drive to meet them? Such a kind, smiling lady, with grey hair and a white cap!

"Dear Aunt Emma!" said Mrs Norton, running up to her and taking both her hands and kissing her.

"Well, Lucy," said the lady, holding her hands and looking at her (Lucy was Mrs. Norton's Christian name), "it *is* nice to see you all here. And there's dear little Milly, I remember her. But where's Olly? I've never seen that small creature, you know. Come, Olly, don't be shy. Little boys are never shy with Aunt Emma."

"Except when they tumble into bogs," said Mr. Norton, laughing and pulling Olly forward, who was trying to hide his mud-stockings behind his mother. "There's a clean, tidy boy to bring to dinner, isn't he, Aunt Emma? I think I'll take him to the yard and pump on him a little before we bring him in."

Aunt Emma put up her spectacles to look at Olly.

"Why, Olly, I think Mother Quiverquake has been catching hold of you. Don't you know about old Mother Quiverquake, who lives in the bogs? Oh, I can tell you splendid stories about her some day. But now catch hold of my hand, and keep your little legs away from my dress, and we'll soon make a proper boy of you again."

And then Aunt Emma took one of Milly's hands and one of Olly's, and up they went to the house. But I must start another chapter before I begin to tell you what the children saw in Aunt Emma's house, and of the happy time they spent there.

CHAPTER V

AUNT EMMA'S PICNIC

INSTEAD of taking them straight into the house, however, Aunt Emma took the children up a little shady path which very soon brought them to a white cottage covered with honeysuckle and climbing roses.

"This is where my coachman's wife lives," said Aunt Emma, "and she owns a small boy who might perhaps find you a pair of stockings, Olly, to put on while your own are washed."

Olly opened his brown eyes very wide at the idea of wearing some other little boy's stockings, but he said nothing.

Aunt Emma tapped at the door, and out came a stout, kind-looking woman.

"Mrs. Tyson, do you think your Johnny could lend my little nephew a pair of his stockings while we get his own washed? Master Olly has been tumbling into a bog by way of making friends with the mountains, and I don't quite know how I am to let those legs into my dining-room."

"Dear me, ma'am, but Johnny'll be proud if he's got any clean, but I'll not answer for it. Won't ye come in?"

In they walked, and there was a nice tidy kitchen, with a wooden cradle in the corner, and a little fair-haired boy sitting by it and rocking the baby. This was Johnny, and Olly looked at him with great curiosity.

"I've got bigger legs than Johnny," he whispered solemnly at last to Aunt Emma, while they were waiting for Mrs. Tyson, who had gone upstairs to fetch the stockings.

"Perhaps you eat more bread and milk than Johnny does," said Aunt Emma, very solemnly too. "However, most likely Johnny's stockings will stretch. How's the baby, Johnny?"

"She's a great deal better, ma'am," said the little boy, smiling at her. Milly and Olly made him feel shy, but he loved Aunt Emma.

"Have you been taking care of her all the morning for mother?"

"Yes, ma'am, and she's never cried but once," said Johnny proudly.

"Well done! Ah! there comes Mrs. Tyson. Now, Olly, sit up on that chair, and we'll see to you."

Off came the dirty stockings, and Mrs. Tyson slipped on a pair of woollen socks that tickled Olly very much. They were very thick, and not a bit like his own stockings; and when he got up again he kept turning round and round to look at his legs, as if he couldn't make them out.

"Do they feel funny to you?" said Mrs. Tyson, patting his shoulder. "Never you mind, little master; I know they're nice and warm, for I knitted them myself."

"Mother buys our stockings in the shop," said Olly, when they got outside again; "why doesn't Mrs. Tyson?"

"Perhaps we haven't so many shops, or such nice ones, here, Olly, as you have at Willingham; and the people here have always been used to do a great many things for themselves. Some of them live in such lonely places among the mountains that it is very difficult for them to get to any shops. Not very long ago the mothers used to make all the stuffs for their own dresses and their children's. What would you say, Milly, if mother had to weave the stuff for it every time you had a new dress?"

"Mother wouldn't give me a great many new dresses," said Milly gravely, shaking her head. "I like shops best, Aunt Emma."

"Well, I suppose it's best to like what we've got," said Aunt Emma, laughing.

Indoors, Olly's muddy stockings were given to Aunt Emma's maid, who promised to have them washed and dried by the time they had to go home, and then, when Mrs. Norton had covered up the black spots on his frock with a clean pinafore she had brought with her, Olly looked quite respectable again.

The children thought they had never seen quite such a nice house as Aunt Emma's. First of all it had a large hall, with all kinds of corners in it, just made for playing hide-and-seek in, and the drawing-room was full of the most delightful things. There were stuffed birds in cases, and little ivory chessmen riding upon ivory elephants. There were picture-books, and there were mysterious drawers full of cards and puzzles, and glass marbles and old-fashioned toys that the children's mother and aunts and uncles, and their great-aunts and uncles before that, had loved and played with years and years ago. On the wall hung a great many pictures, some of them of funny little stiff boys in blue coats with brass buttons, and some of them of little girls with mob-caps and mittens, and these little boys and girls were all either dead now or elderly men and women, for they were the great-aunts and uncles; and over the mantelpiece hung a picture of a lovely old lady, with bright, soft brown hair and smiling eyes and lips, that looked as if they were just going to speak to the two strange little children who had come for their first visit to their mother's old home. Milly knew quite well that it was a picture of great-grandmamma. She had seen others like it before, only not so large as this one, and she looked at it quietly with her grave blue eyes, while Olly was eagerly wandering round the room, spying into everything, and longing to touch this, that, and the other, if only mother would let go his hand.

"You know who that is, don't you, little woman?" said Aunt Emma, taking her up on her knee.

"Yes," said Milly, nodding; "it's great-grandmamma. I wish we could have seen her."

"I wish you could, Milly. She would have smiled at you as she is smiling in the picture, and you would have been sure to have loved her; all little children did. I can remember seeing your mother, Milly, when she was about as old as you, cuddled up in a corner of that sofa over there, in 'grandmamma's pocket,' as she used to call it, listening with all her ears to greatgrandmamma's stories. There was one story called 'Leonora' that went on for years and years, till all the little children in it—and the little children who listened to it—were almost grown up; and then greatgrandmamma always carried about with her a wonderful blue silk bag full of treasures, which we used to be allowed to turn out whenever any of us had been quite good at our lessons for a whole week."

"Mother has a bag like that," said Milly; "it has lots of little toys in it that father had when he was a little boy. She lets us look at it on our birthdays. Can you tell stories, Aunt Emma?"

"Tell us about old Mother Quiverquake," cried Olly, running up and climbing on his aunt's knee.

"Oh dear no!" said Aunt Emma; "it's much too fine to-day for stories—indoors, at any rate. Wait till we get a real wet day, and then we'll see. After dinner to-day what do you think we're going to do? Suppose we have a row on the lake to get waterlilies, and suppose we take a kettle and make ourselves some tea on the other side of the lake—what would you say to that, Master Olly?"

The children began to dance about with delight at the idea of a row and a picnic both together, when suddenly there was a knock at the door, and when Aunt Emma said "Come in!" what do you think appeared? Why, a great green cage, carried by a servant, and in it a grey parrot, swinging about from side to side, and cocking its head wickedly, first over one shoulder and then over the other.

"Now, children," said Aunt Emma, while the children stood quite still with surprise, "let me introduce you to my old friend, Mr. Poll Parrot. Perhaps you thought I lived all alone in this big house. Not at all. Here is somebody who talks to me when I talk to him, who sings and chatters and whistles and cheers me up wonderfully in the winter evenings, when the rains come and make me feel dull. Put him down here, Margaret," said Aunt Emma to the maid, clearing a small table for the cage. "Now, Olly, what do you think of my parrot?"

"Can it talk?" asked Olly, looking at it with very wide-open eyes.

"It *can* talk; whether it *will* talk is quite another thing. Parrots are contradictious birds. I feel very often as if I should like to beat Polly, he's so provoking. Now, Polly, how are you to-day?"

"Polly's got a bad cold; fetch the doc——" said the bird at once, in such a funny cracked

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

A GREAT GREEN CAGE, CARRIED BY A SERVANT, AND IN IT A GREY PARROT.

voice that it made Olly jump as if he had heard one of the witches in Grimm's *Fairy Tales* talking.

"Come, Polly, that's very well behaved of you; but you mustn't leave off in the middle —begin again. Olly, if you don't keep your fingers out of the way Polly will snap them up for his dinner. Parrots like fingers very much."

Olly put his hands behind his back in a great hurry, and mother came to stand behind him to keep him quiet. By this time, however, Polly had begun to find out that there were some new people in the room he didn't know, and for a long time Aunt Emma could not make him talk at all. He would do nothing but put his head first on one side and then on the other and make angry clicks with his beak.

"Come, Polly," said Aunt Emma, "what a cross parrot you are! One—two—three—four. Now, Polly, count."

"Polly's got a bad cold; fetch the doc——" said Polly again while Aunt Emma was speaking. "One—two—six—seven—eight—nine—two—*Quick* march!"

And then Polly began to lift first one claw and then the other as if he were marching, while the children shouted with laughter at his ridiculous ways and his gruff, cracked voice.

Then Aunt Emma went behind him and rapped gently on the table. The parrot stopped marching, stuck his head on one side and listened. Aunt Emma rapped again.

"Come in!" said the parrot suddenly, quite softly, as if he had turned into quite another person. "Hush-sh-sh, cat's got a mouse!"

"Well, Polly," said Aunt Emma, "I suppose she may have a mouse if she likes. Is that all you've got to tell us? Polly, where's gardener?"

"Get away! get away!" screamed Polly, while all his feathers began to stand up straight and his eyes looked fierce and red, like two little live coals.

"That always makes him cross," said Aunt Emma; "he can't bear gardener. Come, Polly, don't get in such a temper."

"Oh, isn't he like the witches on the broomsticks in our fairy-book, Olly?" cried Milly. "Don't you think, Aunt Emma, he must have been changed into something? Perhaps he was a wicked witch once, or a magician, you know, and the fairies changed him into a parrot."

"Well, Milly, I can't say. He was a parrot when I had him first, twelve years ago. That's all I know about it. But I believe he's very old. Some people say he's older than I am—think of that! So you see he's had time to be a good many things. Well, Polly, good-night. You're not a nice bird to-night at all. Take him away, Margaret."

"Jane! Jane!" screamed Polly, as the maid lifted up the cage again. "Make haste, Jane! cat's in the larder!"

"Oh, you bad Polly," said Aunt Emma, "you're always telling tales. Jane's my cook, Milly, and Polly doesn't like cats, so you see he tries to make Jane believe that our old cat steals the meat out of the larder. Goodbye, Polly, goodbye. You're an ill-natured old bird, but I'm very fond of you all the same."

"Do get us a parrot, mother!" said Olly, jumping about round his mother, when Polly was gone.

"How many more things will you want before you get home, Olly, do you think?" asked his mother, kissing him. "Perhaps you'll want to take home a few mountains, and two or three little rivers, and a bog or two, and a few sheep—eh, young man?"

By this time dinner was ready, and there was the dinner-bell ringing. Up ran the children to Aunt Emma's room to get their hands washed and their hair brushed, and presently there were two tidy little folks sitting on either side of Aunt Emma's chair and thinking to themselves that they had never felt quite so hungry before. But, hungry as Milly was, she didn't forget to look out of window before she began her dinner, and it was worth while looking out of window in Aunt Emma's dining-room.

Before the windows was a green lawn, like the lawn at Ravensnest, only this lawn went sloping away, away till there was just a little rim of white beach, and then beyond came the wide dancing blue lake that the children had seen from the top of the mountain. Here it was close to them—so close that Milly could hear the little waves plashing, through the open window.

"Milly," whispered Aunt Emma when they were all waiting for pudding, "do you see that little house down there by the water's edge? That's where the boat lives—we call it a boathouse. Do you think you'll be frightened of the water, little woman?"

"No, I don't think so," said Milly, shaking her little wise head gravely. "I am frightened sometimes, very. Mother calls me a little goose because I run away from Jenny sometimes—that's our cow at home, Aunt Emma, but then she's got such long horns, and I can't help feeling afraid."

"Well, the lake hasn't got horns, Milly," said Aunt Emma, laughing, "so perhaps you will manage not to be afraid of it."

How kind and nice Aunt Emma looked as she sat between the children, with one of their little hands in each of hers. Mrs. Norton could not help thinking of the time when she was a little girl and used always to insist on sitting by Aunt Emma at dinner-time. That was before Aunt Emma's hair had turned grey. And now here were her own little children sitting where she used to sit at their age, and stealing their small hands into

Aunt Emma's lap as she used to do so long ago.

After dinner the children had to sit quiet in the drawing-room for a time while Aunt Emma and father and mother talked; but they had picture-books to look at, and Aunt Emma gave them leave to turn out everything in one of the toy drawers, and that kept them busy and happy for a long time. But at last, just when Olly was beginning to get tired of the drawer, Aunt Emma called to them from the other end of the room to come with her into the kitchen for a minute. Up jumped the children and ran after their aunt across the hall into the kitchen.

"Now, children," said Aunt Emma, pointing to a big basket on the kitchen table, "suppose you help me to pack up our tea-things. Olly, you go and fetch the spoons, and, Milly, bring the plates one by one."

The tea-things were all piled up on the kitchen table, and the children brought them one after another to Aunt Emma to pack them carefully into the big basket.

"Aint I a useful boy, Aunt Emma?" asked Olly proudly, coming up laden with

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

"AIN'T I A USEFUL BOY, AUNT EMMA?"

a big tablecloth which he could scarcely carry.

"Very useful, Olly, though our tablecloth won't look over-tidy at tea if you crumple it up like that. Now, Milly, bring me that tray of bread and the little bundle of salt; and, Olly, bring me that bit of butter over there, done up in the green leaves, but mind you carry it carefully. Now for some knives too; and there are the cups and saucers, Milly, look, in that corner; and there is the cake already cut up, and there is the bread and butter. Now, have we got everything? Everything, I think, but the kettle, and some wood and some matches, and these must go in another basket."

"Aunt Emma," said Milly, creeping up close to her, "were you ever a fairy godmother?"

"Not that I know of, Milly. Would you like me better if I had a wand and a pair of pet dragons, like old Fairy Blackstid?"

"No," said Milly, stroking her aunt's hand, "but you do such nice things—just like fairy godmothers do."

"Do I, little woman? Aunt Emma likes

doing nice things for good children. But now, come along—it's quite time we were off. Let us go and fetch father and mother. Gardener will bring the baskets."

Such a merry party they were, trooping down to the boathouse. There lay the boat—a pretty new boat, painted dark blue, with a little red flag floating at her bows and her name, *Ariel*, written in large white letters on the stern. And all around the boathouse stretched the beautiful blue water, so clear and sunny and sparkling that it dazzled Milly's eyes to look at it. She and Olly were lifted into the boat beside Aunt Emma and mother, father sat in the middle and took the oars, while gardener put the baskets into the stern, and then, untying the rope which kept the boat tied into the boathouse, he gave it a good push with one hand and off she went out into the blue lake, rising up and down on the water like a swan.

"Oh! mother, mother, look up there," shouted Olly, "there's the mountain. Isn't that where we climbed up this morning?"

Yes, there it was, the beautiful green rocky mountain, rising up above Aunt

Emma's house. They could see it all so clearly as they got farther out into the lake; first the blue sky, then the mountain with the little white dots on it which Milly knew were sheep; then some trees, and in front, Aunt Emma's house with the lawn and the boathouse. And as they looked all round them they could see far bigger and grander mountains than Brownholme—some near and green like Brownholme, and some far away and blue like the sky; while down by the edge of the lake were hayfields full of flowers, or bits of rock with trees growing on the top of them. The children hardly knew what it was made them so quiet, but I think it was because everything was so beautiful. They were really in the hill-fairies' palace now.

"Aren't there any water-fairies in this lake, mother?" whispered Milly presently, looking down into the clear blue water and trying to see the bottom.

"I can't tell, Milly—I never saw any. But there used to be water-fairies in old days. After tea, suppose we ask Aunt Emma to tell us a story about a king in olden times whom the water-fairies loved; she used to tell it to me when I was small, and I liked it best of all stories. But, Olly, you must sit still, or the boat will go tipping over to one side and father won't be able to row."

"Do let me row, father," begged Olly.

"Not yet, old man. I must get used to the boat first, and find out how to manage her, but presently you shall come and try, and so shall Milly, if she likes."

On they rowed, farther and farther from the shore, till Aunt Emma's house began to look quite small, and they could hardly see the gardener working on the lawn.

"Father, what a long way we've come!" cried Milly, looking all round. "Where are we going to?"

"Well, presently, Milly, I am going to turn the boat a little bit, so as to make her go over to that side of the lake over there. Do you see a big rock with some trees on it, far away, sticking out into the lake?"

"Yes," said the children, looking very hard.

"Well, that's where we're going to have tea. It's called Birdsnest Point, because the rocks come out in a point into the lake. But first I thought I would bring you right out into the middle of the lake, that you might see how big it is, and look at the mountains all round."

"Father," said Olly, "if a big stone fell down out of the sky and made ever such a big hole in the boat, and the water came into the hole, should we all be dead?"

"I daresay we should, Olly, for I don't think I could carry mother and Aunt Emma and Milly and you on my back safe home again, and you see none of you can swim but me."

"Then I hope a big stone won't come," said Milly, feeling just a little bit frightened at Olly's suggestion.

"Well, big stones don't grow in the sky generally, Milly, if that's any comfort to you. But, do you know, one day long ago, when I was out rowing on this lake, I thought all of a sudden I heard some one shouting and screaming, and for a long time I looked and waited, but could see nothing, till at last I fancied I could see, a long distance off, what looked like a pole with something white tied to it. And I rowed, and rowed, and rowed, as fast as I could, and all the time the shouting and screaming went on, and at last what do you think I saw? I saw a boat, which looked as if something was dragging it down into the water. Part of it had already sunk down into the lake, and in the part which was still above the water there were three people sitting—a gentleman and two little girls, who looked about ten years old. And they were shouting 'Help! Help!' at the top of their voices, and waving an oar with a handkerchief tied to it. And the boat in which they sat was sinking farther and farther into the water, and if I hadn't come up just when I did, the gentleman and the two little girls would have been drowned."

"Oh, father!" cried Milly, "what made their boat do like that? And did they get into yours?"

"There was a great hole in the bottom of their boat, Milly, and the water was coming through it, and making the boat so heavy that it was sinking down and down into the lake, just as a stone would sink if you threw it in. How the hole came there we never quite knew: I thought they must have knocked their boat against a sharp rock

—in some parts of the lake there are rocks under the water which you can't see—and the rock had made the hole; but other people thought it had happened in some other way. However, there they were, and when I took them all into my boat you never saw such miserable little creatures as the two little girls were. They were wet through, they were as white as little ghosts, and when they were safe in my boat they began to cry and shake so, poor little souls! though their father and I wrapped them up in our coats, that I did want their mother to come and comfort them."

"Oh, but, father, you took them safe home to their mother, didn't you? And do tell me what she said."

"They had no mother, Milly; they had only their father, who was with them. But he was very good to them, and I think on the whole they were happy little girls. The Christmas after that I got a little parcel one morning, and what do you think was in it? Why, two photographs of the same little girls, looking so neat and tidy and happy I could hardly believe they were really the same as the little drowned rats I had pulled out of the water. Ask mother to show you the pictures when we get home; she has them somewhere. Now, Olly, would you like to row?"

"Oh, father, don't bump against any rocks," said Milly, whose thoughts were very full of the little girls.

"Don't you trouble your head about rocks, old woman. I know a good deal more about this lake than those little girls' father did, and I won't take you into any harm. Come along, Olly."

Olly was helped along the boat by mother and Aunt Emma till his father caught hold of him and pulled him on to his seat, where he let him put his two small paws on one of the oars and try what he could do with it. Mr. Norton pulled too; but Olly thought it was all his doing, and that it was really he who was making the boat go.

"Don't we go fast, father?" he cried out presently, his little face flushed with pleasure and excitement. "You couldn't row so fast without me, could you, father?"

"You little fly-on-the-wheel!" said his father, smiling at him.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

"YOU COULDN'T ROW SO FAST WITHOUT ME, COULD YOU, FATHER?"

"What does that mean, father?"

"Never mind—you'll know when you're bigger. But now look, children, how close we are coming to the shore. And quick, Milly, quick! What do you see over there?"

Mr. Norton pointed over the water to a place where some green rushes were standing up out of the water, not very far from the edge. What were those great white and gold things shining among the rushes, and what were those large round green leaves lying on the water all about them?

"Waterlilies! waterlilies!" cried Milly, stamping her little feet with delight. "Oh, mother, look! it was on one of those leaves that the old toad put little Tiny in my fairy book, don't you remember? Only the little fishes came and bit off the stalk and set her free. Oh, I wish we could see little Tiny sitting on one of those leaves!"

"Well," said Aunt Emma, "there's no saying what you may find in these parts if you look long enough. This is a very strange country. But now, Milly, look out for the lilies. Father's going to take us in among them, and I'll hold you while you gather them."

And presently, swish went the boat up against the rushes, and there were the lovely white lilies lying spread out on the water all round them, some quite open and showing their golden middles, and some still buds, with their wet green cases just falling off and their white petals beginning to unclose. But what slippery stalks they had! Aunt Emma held Milly and father held Olly while they dived their hands under the water and pulled hard. And some of the lilies came out with such short bits of stalk you could scarcely hold them, and sometimes, flop! out came a long green stalk, like a long green snake curling and twisting about in the boat. The children dabbled and splashed and pulled to their hearts' content, till at last Mr. Norton told them they had got enough, and now they must sit quite still while he rowed them in to the land.

"Oh, father, just those two over there!" pleaded Milly, who could not bear leaving so many beauties behind.

"No, Milly, no more. Look where the sun is now. If we don't make haste and have our tea we shall never get back to Ravensnest to-night."

Milly's face looked as if it would like to cry, as the boat began to move away from the rushes and the beautiful lilies were left behind. I told you, to begin with, that Milly was ready to cry oftener than a sensible little girl should. But Aunt Emma was not going to have any crying at her picnic.

"Who's going to gather me sticks to make my fire?" she said suddenly, in a solemn voice.

"I am! I am!" shouted both the children at once, and out came Milly's smiles again, like the sun from behind a cloud.

"And who's going to lay the tablecloth?"

"We are! we are!"

"And who's going to hand the bread-and-butter?"

"I am!" exclaimed Milly, "and Olly shall hand the cake."

"And who's going to *eat* the bread-and-butter?"

"All of us!" shouted the children, and Milly added, "Father will want a *big* plate of bread-and-butter, I daresay."

"I should think he would, after all this rowing," said Mr. Norton. "Now then, look out for a bump!"

Bump! splash! there was the boat scraping along the pebbles near the shore; out sprang Mr. Norton, first on to a big stone, then on to the shore, and with one great pull he brought the boat in till it was close enough for Aunt Emma and Mrs. Norton to step on to the rocks and for the children to be lifted out.

"Oh! what a nice place!" cried Milly, looking about her and clapping her hands, as she always did when she was pleased. It was a point of rock running out into the lake—a "peninsula" Milly called it, when she had been all round it, and it was covered with brown heather spread all over the ground, and was delightfully soft and springy to sit upon. In the middle of the bit of rock there were two or three trees standing up together, birch-trees with silvery stems, and on every side but one there was shallow brown water, so clear that they could see every stone at the bottom. And when they looked away across the lake, there were the grand old mountains pushing their heads into the clouds on the other side, and far away near the edge of the lake they saw a white dot which they knew was Aunt

Emma's house. How the sun shone on everything! How it made the water of the lake sparkle and glitter as if it were alive! And yet the air was not hot, for a little wind was coming to them across the water and moving the trees gently up and down.

And what was this under the trees? Why, a kind of fireplace made of stones, and in front of it a round green bit of grass with tufts of heather all round it, just like a table with seats.

"Who put these stones here, Aunt Emma?" asked Olly, as she and mother and Mr. Norton brought up the baskets and put them in the green place by the stones.

"Well, Olly, long ago, when all your uncles and aunts were little and they used to come here for picnics, they thought it would be very nice to have a stone fireplace, built up properly, so that they needn't make one every time. It was Uncle Richard's idea, and we had such fun building it up. The little ones brought the stones, and the big ones piled them together, till you see we made quite a nice fireplace. And it has lasted ever since. Whenever I come here I mend it up if any of the stones have tumbled down. Numbers of little children come to picnic here every summer, and they always use our fireplace. But now, come along into the wood, children, and gather sticks."

Off they ran after Aunt Emma, and soon they were scrambling about the wood which grew along the shore, picking up the dry sticks and dry fern under the trees. Milly filled her cotton frock full, and gathered it up with both her hands; while Olly of course went straight at the biggest branch he could see, and staggered along with it, puffing and panting.

"You grasshopper, you!" said Mr. Norton, catching hold of him; "don't you think you'd better try a whole tree next time? There, let me break it for you." Father broke it up into short lengths, and then off ran Olly with his little skirts full to Aunt Emma, who was laden too with an armful of sticks.

"That'll do to begin with, old man. Come along, and you and I'll light the fire."

What fun it was, heaping up the sticks on the stones; and how they did blaze and crackle away when Aunt Emma put a match to them!

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

"YOU GRASSHOPPER, YOU!" SAID MR. NORTON.

Puff! puff! out came the smoke; fizz—crack—sputter went the dry fir branches, as if they were Christmas fireworks.

"*Haven't* we made a blazey fire, Aunt Emma?" said Olly, out of breath with dragging up sticks, and standing still to look.

"Splendid!" said Mr. Norton, who had just come out of the wood with his bundle. "Now, Olly, let me just put you on the top of it to finish it off. How you would fizz!"

Off ran Olly, with his father after him, and they had a romp among the heather till Mr. Norton caught him and carried him kicking and laughing under his arm to Aunt Emma.

"Now, Aunt Emma, shall I put him on?"

"Oh dear, no!" said Aunt Emma; "my kettle wouldn't sit straight on him, and it's just boiling beautifully. We'll put him on presently, when the fire gets low."

"Olly, do come and help mother and me with the tea-things," cried Milly, who was laying the cloth as busily and gravely as a little housemaid.

"Run along, shrimp," said his father, setting him down.

And off ran Olly, while Mr. Norton and Aunt Emma heaped the wood on the fire and kept the kettle straight, so that it shouldn't tip over and spill.

Laying the cloth was delightful, Milly thought. First of all, they put a heavy stone on each corner of the cloth to keep it down and prevent the wind from blowing it up, and then they put the little plates all round, and in the middle two piles of bread-and-butter and cake.

"But we haven't got any flowers," said Milly, looking at it presently with a dissatisfied face; "you always have flowers on the table at home, mother."

"Why, Milly, have you forgotten your waterlilies?—where did you leave them?"

"Down by the water," said Milly. "Father told me just to put their stalks in the water, and he put a stone to keep them safe. Oh! that'll be splendid, mother. Do give me a cup, and we'll get some water for them."

Mother found a cup, and the children scrambled down to the edge of the lake. There lay the lilies with their stalks in the water, close to the boat.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

"WE NEVER HAD SUCH A NICE TEA AS THIS BEFORE."

"They look rather sad, mother, don't they?" said Milly, gathering them up. "Perhaps they don't like being taken away from their home."

"They never look so beautiful out of the water," said mother; "but when we get home we'll put them into a soup-plate and let them swim about in it. They'll look very nice then. Now, Olly, fill the cup with water, and we'll put five or six of the biggest in, and gather some leaves."

"There, look! look, Aunt Emma!" shouted Milly, when they had put the lilies and some fern leaves in the middle of the table. "Haven't we made it beautiful?"

"That you have," said Aunt Emma, coming up with the kettle, which had just boiled. "Now for the tea, and then we're ready."

"We never had such a nice tea as this before," said Olly presently, looking up from a piece of bread-and-butter which had kept him quiet for some time. "It's nicer than having dinner at the railway-station even."

Aunt Emma and mother laughed; for it doesn't seem so delightful to grown-up people to have dinner at the railway-station.

"Well, Olly," said mother, "I hope we shall often have tea out of doors while we are at Ravensnest."

Milly shook her head. "It'll rain, mother. That old gentleman said it would be sure to rain."

"That old gentleman is about right, Milly," said Mr. Norton. "*I* think it rains dreadfully here, but mother doesn't seem to mind it a bit. Once upon a time, when mother was a little girl, there came a funny old fairy and threw some golden dust in her eyes, and ever since then she can't see straight when she comes to the mountains. It's all right everywhere else, but as soon as she comes here the dust begins to fly about in her eyes, and makes the mountains look quite different to her from what they look to anybody else."

"Let me look, mother," said Olly, pulling her down to him.

Mrs. Norton opened her eyes at him, smiling.

"I can't see any dust, father."

"Ah, that's because it's fairy dust," said Mr. Norton gravely. "Now, Olly, don't you eat too much cake, else you won't be able to row."

"It'll be my turn first, father," said Milly; "you know I haven't rowed at all yet."

"Well, don't you catch any crabs, Milly," said Aunt Emma.

"Catch crabs, Aunt Emma!" said Milly, very much puzzled. "Crabs are only in the sea, aren't they?"

"There's a very big kind just about here," said Mr. Norton, "and they're always looking out for little children, particularly little girls."

"I don't understand, father," said Milly, opening her eyes very wide.

"Have some more tea, then," said Mr. Norton; "that always makes people feel wiser."

"Father, aren't you talking nonsense?" said Olly, stopping in the middle of a piece of cake to think about what his father was saying.

"Very likely, Olly. People always do at picnics. Aunt Emma, when are you going to tell us your story?"

"When we've washed the things and put them away," said Aunt Emma; "then Olly shall sing us two songs, and I'll tell you my story."

But the children were so hungry that it was a long time before they gave up eating bread-and-butter; and then, when at last tea was over, what fun it was washing the cups and plates in the lake! Aunt Emma and Olly washed, and mother and Milly dried the things on a towel, and then everything was packed away into the baskets, and mother and Aunt Emma folded up the tablecloth, and put it tidily on the top of everything.

"I did like that," said Milly, sighing as the last basket was fastened down. "I wish you'd let me help Sarah wash up the tea-things at home, mother."

"If Sarah liked to let you, I shouldn't say no, Milly," said Mrs. Norton. "How soon would you get tired of it, old woman, I wonder? But come along; let's put Olly up on a rock and make him sing, and then we'll have Aunt Emma's story."

So they put Olly up on a tall piece of rock, and he sang "The Minstrel Boy" and "Bonnie Dundee" and "Hot Cross Buns," just as if he were a little musical box and you had nothing to do but to wind him up. He had a sweet, clear little voice, and he looked a delightful brown gipsy as he sat

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

HE SAT PERCHED UP ON THE GREAT ROCK.

perched up on the rock with his long legs dangling and his curls blowing about his face.

"There!" said Olly, when he had shouted out the last note of "Hot Cross Buns." "I have singed three whole songs; and now, Aunt Emma, tell us about the king and the fairies. Krick, please."

"It must be 'krick' indeed," said Aunt Emma, "if we want to get home to-night."

For the sun had almost sunk behind the mountains at their back, and the wind blowing across the lake was beginning to get a little cold, while over their heads the rooks went flying, singing "Caw, caw," on their way to bed. And how the sun was turning the water to gold! It seemed to be making a great golden pathway across the lake, and the mountains were turning a deep blue; and plash, plash, went the little waves on the rocks, so softly they seemed to be saying "Good-night! good-night!"

"Well," said Aunt Emma, settling herself on a soft piece of heather and putting her arms round Milly and Olly, "once upon a time there was a great king. He was a good king and a wise man, and he tried to make all the people round about him wiser and better than they were before he came to rule over them; and for a long time he was very powerful and happy, and he and the brave men who helped him and were his friends did a great deal of good, and kept the savage people who lived all about him in order, and taught them a great many things. But at last some of the savage people got tired of obeying the king, and they said they would not have him to reign over them any more; so they made an army, and they came together against the king to try and kill him and his friends. And the king made an army too, and there was a great battle; and the savage people were the strongest, and they killed nearly all the king's brave men, and the king himself was terribly hurt in the fight. And at last, when night came on, there were left only the king and one of his friends—his knights, as they were called. The king was hurt so much that he could not move, and his friend thought he was dying. They were left alone in a rocky desert place, and close by there was a great lake with mountains round it—like this, Olly.

It was very cold, and the moon was shining, and the king lay so still that once or twice his friend almost thought that he was dead. But at last, about the middle of the night, he began to speak, and he told his friend to take his sword that was by his side and to go down to the side of the lake and throw it as far as he could into the water. Now, this sword was a magic sword. Long before, the king was once walking beside this lake, when he suddenly saw an arm in a long white sleeve rising out of the lake, and in the hand at the end of it was a splendid sword with a glistening handle. And the king got into a boat and rowed as fast as he could till he got near enough to take hold of the sword, and then the arm sank down under the water and was seen no more. And with the sword the king won a great many battles, and he loved it, and never would part with it; but now that he was dying, he told his friend to take the sword and throw it back into the lake where he had found it, and see what would happen. And his friend took it, and went away over the rocks till he came to the edge of the lake, and then he took the sword out of its case and swung it above his head that he might throw it far into the water; but as he lifted it up the precious stones in the handle shone so splendidly in the moonlight that he could not make up his mind to throw it into the water, it seemed such a pity. So he hid it away among the rushes by the waterside, and went back to the king. And the king said, 'What did you see by the lake?'

"And the knight said, 'I saw nothing except the water and the mountains and the rushes.'

"And the king said, 'Oh, unkind friend! why will you not do as I ask you, now that I am dying and can do nothing for myself? Go back and throw the sword into the lake, as I told you.'

"And the knight went back, and once more he lifted the sword to throw it into the water; but it looked so beautiful that he *could* not throw it away. There would be nothing left, he thought, to remember the king by when he was dead if he threw away the sword, so again he hid it among the rushes, and then he went back to the king. And again the king asked, 'What did you see by the lake?' and again the knight answered, 'I saw nothing except the water and the mountains.'

"'Oh, unkind, false friend!' cried the king; 'you are crueller to me than those who gave me this wound. Go back and throw the sword into the water, or, weak as I am, I will rise up and kill you!'

"Back went the knight, and this time he seized the sword without looking at it, so that he should not see how beautiful it was; and then he swung it once, twice, thrice round his head, and away it went into the lake. And as it fell, up rose a hand and arm in a long white sleeve out of the water, and the hand caught the sword and drew it down under the water. And then for a moment, all round the lake, the knight fancied he heard a sound of sobbing and weeping, and he thought in his heart that it must be the water-fairies weeping for the king's death.

"'What did you see by the lake?' asked the king again, when he came back, and the knight told him. Then the king told him to lift him up and carry him on his back down to the edge of the lake, and when they got there, what do you think they saw?"

But the children could not guess, and Milly pressed Aunt Emma's hand hard to make her go on.

"They saw a great black ship coming slowly over the water, and on the ship were numbers of people in black, sobbing and crying, so that the air was full of a sound of weeping; and in front sat three queens in long black dresses and with gold crowns on their heads, and they, too, were weeping and wringing their hands.

"'Lift me up,' said the king, when the ship came close beside them, 'and put me into the ship.' And the knight lifted him up, while the three queens stretched out their hands and drew him into the ship.

"'Oh, king! take me with you,' said the knight; 'take me too! What shall I do all alone without you?' But the ship began to move away, and the knight was left standing on the shore. Only he fancied he heard the king's voice saying, 'Wait for me; I shall come again. Farewell!'

"And the ship went faster and faster away

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

"A GREAT BLACK SHIP WAS COMING SLOWLY OVER THE WATER."

into the darkness, for it was a fairy ship, till at last the knight could see it no more. So then he knew that the king had been carried away by the fairies of the lake—the same fairies who had given him the sword in old days, and who had loved him and watched over him all his life. But what did the king mean by saying, 'I shall come again?'"

Then Aunt Emma stopped and looked at the children.

"What did he mean, auntie?" asked Milly, who had been listening with all her ears, and whose little eyes were wet; "and did he ever come back again?"

"Not while the knight lived, Milly. He grew to be quite an old man, and was always hoping that the fairies would bring the king again. But the king never came, and his friend died without seeing him."

"But did he *ever* come again?" asked Olly.

"I don't know, Olly. Some people think that he is still hidden away somewhere by the kind water-fairies, and that some day, when the world wants him very much, he will come back again."

"Do you think he is here in this lake?" whispered Milly, looking at the water.

"How can we tell what's at the bottom of the lake?" said Aunt Emma, smiling. "But no, I don't think the king is hidden in this lake. He didn't live near here."

"What was his name?" asked Milly.

"His name was King Arthur. But now, children, hurry; there is father putting all the baskets into the boat. We must get home as quick as we can."

They rowed home very quickly, except just for a little time when Milly rowed, and they did not go quite so fast as if father were rowing alone. It was quite evening now on the lake, and there were great shadows from the mountains lying across the water. Somehow the children felt much quieter now than when they started in the afternoon. Milly had curled herself up inside mother's arm, and was thinking a great deal about King Arthur and the fairy ship, while Olly was quite taken up with watching the oars as they dipped in and out of the water and occasionally asking his father when he should be big enough to row quite by himself. It seemed a very little time, after all, before they were stepping out of the boat at Aunt Emma's boathouse, and the picnic and the row were both over.

"Goodbye, dear lake," said Milly, turning with her hands full of waterlilies to look back before they went up to the house. "Good-night, mountains; good-night, Birdsnest Point. I shall soon come and see you again."

A few minutes more and they were safely packed into a carriage, which drove them back to Ravensnest, and Aunt Emma was saying goodbye to them.

"Next time I shall come and see you, Milly," she said as she kissed Milly's little sleepy face. "Don't forget me till then."

"Then you'll tell us about old Mother Quiverquake," said Olly, hugging her with his small arms. "Aunt Emma, I haven't given Johnny back his stockings. They did tickle me so in the boat."

"We'll get them some time," said Aunt Emma. "Good-night, good-night!"

It was a sleepy pair of children that nurse lifted out of the carriage at Ravensnest. And though they tried to tell her something about it, she had to wait till next morning before she could really understand anything about their wonderful day at Aunt Emma's house.

CHAPTER VI

WET DAYS AT RAVENSNEST

FOR about a week after the row on the lake the weather was lovely, and Milly wondered more than ever what the old gentleman who warned them of the rain in the mountains could have been thinking about. She and Olly were out all day, and nearly every afternoon nurse lifted the tea-table through the low nursery window on to the lawn and let them have their tea out of doors among the flowers and trees and twittering birds. They had found out a fly-catcher's nest in the ivy above the front door, and every evening the two children used to fetch out their father to watch the parent birds catching flies and carrying them to the hungry little ones, whom they could just hear chirping up above the ivy. Olly was wild to get the gardener's ladder that he might climb up and look into the nest, but Mr. Norton would not have it, lest it should frighten away the old birds.

One delicious warm morning, too, the children had their long-promised bathe, and what fun it was! Nurse woke them up at five o'clock in the morning—fancy waking up as early as that!—and they slipped on their little blue bathing gowns and their sand-shoes that mother had bought them in Cromer the year before, and then nurse wrapped them up in shawls, and she and they and father went down and opened the front door while everybody else in the house was asleep, and slipped out. What a quiet, strange world it seemed, the grass and the flowers dripping with dew, and overhead such a blue sky, with white clouds sailing slowly about in it.

"Why don't we always get up at five o'clock, father?" asked Olly, as he and Milly skipped along—such an odd little pair of figures—beside Mr. Norton. "Isn't it nice and funny?"

"Very," said Mr. Norton. "Still, I imagine, Olly, if you had to get up every day at five o'clock you might think it funny, but I'm sure you wouldn't always think it nice."

"Oh! I'm sure we should," said Milly seriously. "Why, father, it's just as if everything was ours and nobody else's—the garden and the river I mean. Is there *anybody* up yet, do you think, in those houses?" And Milly pointed to the few houses they could see from the Ravensnest garden.

"I can't tell, Milly. But I'll tell you who's sure to be up now, and that's John Backhouse. I should think he's just beginning to milk the cows."

"Oh, then, Becky and Tiza'll be up too," cried Milly, dancing about. "I wish we could see them. Somehow it would be quite different seeing them now, father. I feel so queer—as if I was somebody else."

If you have ever been up *very* early on a summer morning you will know what Milly meant, but if not, I can hardly explain it. Such a pretty, quiet little walk they had down to the river. Nobody on the road, nobody in the fields, but the birds chattering and the sun shining, as if they were having a good time all to themselves before

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

MILLY CAME STEPPING FROM ONE BIG STONE TO ANOTHER.

anybody woke up to interrupt them. Mr. Norton took the children down to the stepping-stones, and then, while Milly and nurse stayed on the bank, he lifted Olly up and carried him to the middle of the stepping-stones, where the water would about come up to his chest. Mr. Norton had already taken off his own shoes and stockings, and when they came to the middle stone he put Olly down on the stone and stepped into the water himself. "Now, Olly, give me your hands and jump in. Mind, it'll feel very cold."

Olly shut his eyes and opened his mouth, as he always did when he felt just a little frightened, and then in he went: splash! ugh! it was so cold—much colder than the sea used to feel—but after a few splashes Olly began to get used to it and to think it fine fun.

"Oh, father, fetch Milly, and then we'll all dance about," entreated Olly.

"Come, Milly," called Mr. Norton. "Try whether you can manage the stepping-stones by yourself." So Milly came, holding up her bathing dress, and stepping from one big stone to another with a very grave face, as if she felt that there would be an end of her altogether if she tumbled in. And then, splash! In she jumped by the side of Olly, and after a little shiver or two she also began to think that the river was a delightful bathing-place, almost as nice as the sea; perhaps in some ways nicer, because it was such a strange and funny one. They danced and splashed about in the brown sparkling water till they were tired, and at last Olly stopped to take breath.

"I should think the fishes must be frightened of us," he said, peering down into the river. "I can't see any, father."

"Well, they wouldn't choose to swim about just where little children are shouting and capering. The fishes are hidden safe away under the banks and the big stones. Besides, it's going to be a very hot day, and they like the shady bits of the river. Just here there's no shade."

Suddenly there was a great commotion in the river, and when Mr. Norton looked round for a second he could see nothing of Milly, till up came a dripping head and a pair of hands, and there was Milly kneeling on the stones at the bottom of the river with just her head above water, looking very much astonished and rather frightened.

"Why, what happened, old woman ?" said Mr. Norton, holding out his hand to help her up.

"I—I—don't quite know, father; I was standing on a big stone, and all of a sudden it tipped up and I tumbled right in."

"First of all I thought you was a big fish, and then I thought you was going to be drowned," said Olly cheerfully. "I'm glad you wasn't drowned."

"Miss Milly ! Miss Milly !" shouted nurse from the bank ; "it's quite time you came out now. If you stay in so long you'll get cold ; and you, too, Master Olly."

Olly was not inclined to come. He would have liked to go on dabbling and splashing till breakfast time, but Mr. Norton hurried him out, and the two dripping little creatures were well wrapped up in large shawls which nurse had brought with her. Then nurse took up Olly in her arms, and father took up Milly, who was small and light for her age, and they set off up the bit of road to the house. By this time it was past six o'clock, and whom should they meet at the Ravensnest gate but John Backhouse, with Becky and Tiza and his two dogs. He was just bringing the milk, and both he and his children looked as brisk and wide awake as if they had been up and about for hours.

Milly and Olly were very much excited at the sight of them, and Olly struggled hard to get down, but nurse held him tight.

"Oh, Becky! we've had such a nice bathe," cried Milly, as she passed them muffled up in her shawl, her little wet feet dangling out.

Becky and Tiza looked longingly after them as they disappeared into the house. They wished they could have had a bathe too, but they knew very well that their hard-worked father and mother had something else to do on a fine summer's morning than to take them to bathe, and in a few minutes they had forgotten all about it, and were busy playing with the dogs or chattering to their father about the haymaking, which was soon to begin now.

That evening there were strange clouds at sunset time, and Mr. Norton shook his head as he heard Mrs. Norton arrange to take the children next day to a small mountain village near Ravensnest, to call on some old friends of hers.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

OLLY STRUGGLED HARD TO GET DOWN.

"I wouldn't make much of a plan for to-morrow if I were you," he said to his wife; "the weather doesn't look promising."

"Oh, father!" said Milly, protesting; "there are some red clouds over there, look; and Nana always says it's going to be fine when there are red clouds."

"Well, Milly, your red clouds may be right and I may be wrong. We shall see."

But, alas! father was quite right. When Milly woke up next morning there was no nice sunshine creeping on to her bed, as it had done almost ever since they came to Ravensnest; but instead there was rain beating steadily against the window, coming down out of a heavy grey sky, and looking as if it meant to go on for ever.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Milly, as she began to dress, "we can't go out, and the wild strawberries will get so wet. I meant to have gathered some for mother to-day. There would have been such nice ones in the wood."

But it was no use thinking about woods or strawberries, and when Mrs. Norton came into the children's room just as they were finishing breakfast, she found a pair of dull little faces staring out at the rain, as if looking at it would make it stop.

"Nasty rain!" said Olly, climbing up on his mother's knee. "Go to Spain. I don't want you to come and spoil my nicey time."

"I am afraid scolding the rain won't make it go away," said his mother, smiling into his brown face as he knelt on her lap with his arms round her neck. "Now what are we going to do to-day?"

"I don't know," said Milly, sitting down opposite her mother and resting her face gravely on her hands. "Well, we brought *some* toys, you know, mother. Olly's got his top; I can help him spin it, and I can play with Katie a bit."

"That won't take very long," said Mrs. Norton. "Suppose we do some lessons first of all."

"Oh, mother, lessons!" said Milly, in a very doubtful voice.

"It's holidays, mother; it's holidays!" cried Olly. "I don't like lessons—not a bit."

"Well, but, Olly, think a bit; you can't

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

SHE FOUND A PAIR OF DULL LITTLE FACES STARING OUT AT THE RAIN.

spin your top and look at picture-books all day ; and I'm afraid it's going to rain all day —it looks very like it. If you come and do some reading and counting with me this morning, I can give you some spills to make or some letters to tear up for me afterwards. That will save the toys for this afternoon; and some time this afternoon, if it doesn't stop raining, we'll all have a romp. And as for you, Milly, don't you think it's quite time Katie had a new frock ? I believe I can find a beautiful bit of blue silk in my bag, and I'm sure nurse will show you how to make it."

Milly's face brightened up very much at this, and the two children went skipping upstairs to the drawing-room after their mother in very fair spirits again. Olly did some reading, while Milly wrote in her copy-book ; and then Olly had his counting-slate and tried to find out what 6 and 4 made, and 5 and 3, and other little sums of the same kind. He yawned a good deal over his reading, and was quite sure several times that h-a-y spelt "ham," and s-a-w spelt "was," but still, on the whole, he got through very well. Milly wrote her copy ; then she learnt some verses of a poem called "Lucy Gray," and last of all mother found her a big map of Westmoreland, the county in which the mountains are, and they had a most delightful geography lesson. Mother pretended to take Milly a drive all about the mountains, and made her find out their names, and the names of the towns and the lakes, beginning with Lake Windermere. Olly was interested too, for Mrs. Norton told them a great many things about the places, and made quite a story out of it.

"Why, mother, I never could go all that long way all at once—*really*, could I?" asked Milly, when they had been all round the mountains, in and out and round about.

"No, Milly, not quite," said Mrs. Norton, laughing; "but it's very easy to go a long way in a pretendy drive. It would only take us about ten minutes that way to get to the other side of the world."

"How long would it take really?" asked Olly.

"About two months."

"If we could fly up, and up, ever so far," said Olly, standing on tiptoe and stretching out his little arms as high as they would reach, "it wouldn't take us long. Mother, don't you wish you was a bird?"

"No, I don't think so, Olly; why do you?"

"Because I should like to go so *krick.* Mother, the fly-catchers do fly so krick; I can't see them sometimes when they're flying, they go so fast. Oh, I do wish father would let me get up a ladder to look at them."

"No, Olly, you'll frighten them," said Milly, putting on her wise face. "Besides, father says you're too little, and you'd tumble down."

Olly looked as if he didn't believe a word of it, as he generally did when Milly talked wisely to him; but just then he found that mother had put into his lap a whole basketful of letters to tear up, and that interested him so much that he forgot the fly-catchers. Nurse cut out a most fashionable blue dress for Katie, and Milly was quite happy all the rest of the morning in running up the seams and hemming the bottom. So the morning passed away. After dinner there were the toys to play with and Katie's frock to try on, for nurse had taken a turn at the body while Milly had been making the skirt. It fitted very well, and Milly had only the band to put on and the sleeves to make before it would be quite finished. Then nurse promised to put a little white lace round the neck and cut out a blue sash, that Katie might be quite turned into an elegant young lady. Tea came very soon, and when it was cleared away father and mother came into the big kitchen without a fireplace, next to the children's room, and they all had a splendid romp. Mr. Norton made himself into a tiger, with a tiger-skin in the hall that Uncle Richard had brought home from India, and Olly shot him all over with a walking-stick, from the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail. When they were tired of this, mother set them to play hide-and-seek, and Milly hid herself in such out-of-the-way cupboards, and squeezed herself into such small corners, that mother said she was like a needle in a bundle of hay—there was no finding her.

Seven o'clock came before they had time to think about it, and the children went chattering and skipping up to bed, though on fine evenings they had been staying up much later.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

OLLY SHOT HIM ALL OVER WITH A WALKING-STICK.

How the rain did rattle on the window while they were undressing!

"Oh, you tiresome rain!" said Milly, standing by the window in her nightdress, and gazing up into the sky. "Where does it all come from, I wonder? Won't it be wet to-morrow, Nana? and oh! what is that roaring over there?"

"That's the beck," said nurse, who was brushing Olly's hair and trying hard to make him stand still for two minutes.

"The beck! why, what's the matter with it?"

"It's the rain has made it so full, I suppose," said nurse. "To-morrow, gardener says, it'll be over the lawn if the rain goes on."

"Oh, but it mustn't go on!" said Milly. "Now, rain, dear rain, good rain, do go away to-night, right away up into the mountains. There's plenty of room for you up there, and down here we don't want you a bit. So do be polite and go away."

But the rain didn't see any good reason for going away, in spite of Milly's pretty speeches, and next morning there was the same patter on the window, the same grey sky and dripping garden. After breakfast there was just a hope of its clearing up. For about an hour the rain seemed to get less and the clouds a little brighter. But it soon came on again as fast as ever, and the poor children were very much disappointed.

"Mother," said Milly, when they had settled down to their lessons again in the drawing-room, "when we get back to Willingham, do you know what I shall do?"

"No, Milly."

"I shall ask you to take me to see that old gentleman—you know who I mean—who told you about the rain. And I shall say to him, 'Please, Mr. Old Gentleman, at first I thought you were quite wrong about the rain, but afterwards I thought you were quite right, and it does rain dreadfully much in the mountains.'"

"Very well, Milly. But you have only just had a taste of what the rain can do in the Lakes, you know, so far. Father and I have been here sometimes when it has rained two or three weeks without stopping."

"Oh dear!" said Milly, looking extremely melancholy. "I like the mountains very much, mother; but *do* you think we'd better come to Ravensnest again after this year?"

"Oh, you ungrateful little woman!" said Mrs. Norton, whose love for the place was so real that Milly's speech gave her quite a pang. "Have you forgotten all your happy sunshiny days here, just because it has rained for two? Why, when I was a little girl, and used to come here, the rainy days never made me love the place a bit the less. I always used to think the fine days made up."

"But then, mother, you were a nice little girl," said Milly, throwing her arms round her mother's neck and kissing her. "Now, I don't feel a bit nice this morning. It makes me so cross not to be able to go out and get flowers and wild strawberries. And you know at home it hardly ever rains *all* day.'

"Gardener says sometimes it rains all over the road," interrupted Olly, "and people can't walk along, and they have to go right up on the mountains to get past the water place. And sometimes they have to get a boat to take people across. Do you think we shall have to go in a boat to church on Sunday, mother?"

"Well, we're a long way off that yet, Olly. It will take a good many days' rain to flood the roads so deep that we can't get along them, and this is only the second rainy day. Come, I don't think we've got much to complain of. Now suppose, instead of doing all your lessons this morning, you were presently to write to Jacky and Francis—you write to Jacky, Milly, and Olly to Francis. Don't you think that would be a good thing?"

"Oh yes, yes!" cried Milly, shutting up her copybook in a great hurry. "They'll be so much astonished, mother, for we didn't *promise* to write to them. I don't believe they ever get any letters."

The children had a great deal of affection and some secret pity for these playfellows of theirs who had a sick mother, and who did not get half the pleasures and amusements that they did. And, as I have already told you, they could not bear Miss Chesterton, the little boys' aunt, who lived with them. They felt sure that Jacky and Francis must be unhappy, only because they had to live with Miss Chesterton.

UNIV OF
CALIFORNIA

MOTHER WROTE FOR HIM.

This was Milly's letter when it was done. Milly could only write very slowly, in rather big hand, so that her letters were never very long:

"MY DEAR JACKY,—Don't you think it very odd getting a letter from me? It is nearly a fortnight since we came here. At first it was *very* nice. We went up the mountains, and Aunt Emma took us in a boat on the lake. And we gathered some wild strawberries, only some of them were quite white—not red a bit. But now it has begun to rain, and we don't like it at all. Perhaps we shan't be able to get home because the rain will cover up the roads. It is *very* dull staying in, only mother makes us such nice plays. Good-bye, Jacky. I send my love to Francis. Mind you don't forget us.—Your loving little friend,

"MILLY."

Olly wrote a much longer letter—that is to say, mother wrote for him, and he told her what to say; and as this was a much easier way of writing than Milly's way, he got on very fast, and Mrs. Norton had to write as quickly as she could to keep up with him. And this was what Olly had to say:

"MY DEAR FRANCIS,—I wonder what you'll say to-morrow morning when the postman brings you this letter. I hope you'll write back, because it won't be fair if you don't. It isn't such fun here now because it does rain so. Milly and I are always telling the rain to go away, but it won't—though it did at home. Last week we went out in a boat, and I rowed. I rowed a great way—much farther than Milly. We went very slow when Milly rowed. It was very jolly at the picnic. Aunt Emma gave me some cake, and mother gave me some bread and jam. Nana won't let us have cake and jam both, when we have tea at home. Aunt Emma told us a story about King Arthur. I don't believe you ever heard it. The water-fairies took him away, and his friend wanted to go too, but the king said 'No! you must stop behind.' Milly cried because she felt sad about the king. I didn't cry, because I'm a little boy. Mother says you won't understand about the story, and she says we must tell it you when we get home. So we will, only perhaps we shan't remember. Do you do lessons now? we don't do any—only when it rains. Milly's writing a letter to Jacky—mine's much longer than hers.—Your little friend,

"OLLY."

Then came the putting up the letters, addressing them, and stamping them, all of which the children enjoyed very much; and by the time they were laid on the hall-table ready to go to the post it was nearly dinner-time.

How the beck did roar that afternoon! And when the children looked out from the drawing-room window they could see a little flood on the lawn, where the water had come over the side of the stream. While they were having their tea, with mother sitting by, working and chattering to them, they heard a knock at the door, and when they opened it, there was father standing in the unused kitchen, with the water running off his waterproof coat, making little streams all over the stone floor.

"I have been down to look at the river," he said to Mrs. Norton. "Keep off, children! I'm much too wet to touch. Such rain! It does know how to come down here! The water's over the road just by the stepping-stones. John Backhouse says if it goes on another twenty-four hours like this there'll be no getting to Wanwick by the road on foot."

"Father," said Milly, looking at him with a very solemn face, "wouldn't it be dreadful if it went on raining and raining, and if the river came up and up, right up to the drive and into the hall, and we all had to sit upstairs, and the butcher couldn't bring us any meat, and John Backhouse couldn't bring us any milk, and we all *died* of hunger?"

"Then they would put us into some black boxes," said Olly cheerfully, with his mouth full of bread-and-butter, "and they would put the black boxes into some boats, and take us right away and bury us krick—wouldn't they, mother?"

"Well, but," said Mr. Norton, who had by this time got rid of his wet coat, and was seated by Milly, helping himself to some tea, "suppose we got into the boats before we were dead, and rowed away to Windermere station?"

"Oh no, father!" said Milly, who always liked her stories to be as gloomy as possible, "they wouldn't know anything about us till we were dead, you know, and then they'd come and find us, and be *very* sorry for us, and say 'Oh dear! oh dear! what a pity!'"

Olly began to look so dismal as Milly's fancies grew more and more melancholy that Mrs. Norton took to laughing at them all. What did they know about Westmoreland rain indeed! This was nothing—just nothing at all; she *could* remember some floods in the winter-time, when she was a little girl and used to stay with Aunt Emma and great-grandmamma; but as for this—why, it was a good summer wetting, and that was all.

A romp sent the children to bed in excellent spirits again. This time both Milly and Olly stood at the window together and told the rain to be sure to go to Spain that night, and never come back again while they were at Ravensnest.

"Or you might go to Willingham, you

know, dear Mr. Rain," said Milly; "I daresay mother's flowers want a good watering. And there's Spot—you might give her a good washing; she *can* wash herself, but she won't. Only we don't want you here, Mr. Rain."

But what an obstinate, disagreeable Mr. Rain it was! All that night it went on pouring, till the little beck in the garden was so full it was almost choked, and could only get along by sputtering and foaming as if some wicked water-fairies were driving it along and tormenting it. And all the little pools on the mountain—the "tarns," as Becky and Tiza called them—filled up, and the rain made the mountain itself so wet that it was like one big bog all over.

When the children woke up the flood on the lawn was growing bigger, and it seemed to them as if the house and garden were all wrapped up in a wet white cloud-blanket. They could not see the mountain at all from the window—it was all covered with a thick white mist; and the dark fir-trees in the garden looked sad and drooping, as if the weight of raindrops was too much for them to carry.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

NURSE DISCOVERED OLLY SMEARING KATIE'S CHEEKS WITH RASPBERRY JAM.

The children had made up their minds so completely the night before that it *couldn't* rain more than two days running, that they felt as if they could hardly be expected to bear this third wet morning cheerfully. Nurse found them cross and out of spirits at breakfast. Even a prospect of asking Becky and Tiza to tea did not bring any smiles to their forlorn little faces. It would be no fun having anybody to tea. They couldn't go out, and there was nothing amusing indoors.

After breakfast, Olly set to work to get into mischief, as he generally did when he felt dull. Nurse discovered him smearing Katie's cheeks with raspberry jam "to make them get red kricker" as he said, and alas! some of the jam had stuck to the new silk frock and spoilt all its smart fresh look.

When Milly found it out she began to cry, and when Mrs. Norton came in she saw a heap on the floor, which was Milly, sobbing, while Olly sat beside her with his mouth wide open, as if he was a good deal astonished at the result of his first attempt at doctoring.

"Pick up the pieces, old woman," said Mrs. Norton, taking hold of the heap and lifting it up. "What's the matter with you both?"

"Olly's spoilt my doll," sobbed Milly, "and it *will* go on raining—and I feel so—so—dull."

"I didn't spoil her doll, mother," cried Olly eagerly. "I only rubbed some jam on its cheeks to make them a nicey pink—only some of it *would* sticky her dress—I didn't mean to."

"How would you like some jam rubbed on your cheeks, sir?" said Mrs. Norton, who could scarcely help laughing at poor Katie's appearance when nurse handed the doll to her. "Suppose you leave Milly's dolls alone for the future; but cheer up, Milly! I think I can make Katie very nearly right again. Come upstairs to my room and we'll try."

After a good deal of sponging and rubbing and careful drying by the kitchen fire, Katie came very nearly right again, and then Mrs. Norton tried whether some lessons would drive the rain out of the children's heads. But the lessons did not go well. It was all Milly could do to help crying every time she got a figure wrong in her sums, and Olly took about ten minutes to read two lines of his reading-book. Olly had just begun his sums, and Milly was standing up to say some poetry to her mother, looking a woebegone little figure, with pale cheeks and heavy eyes, when suddenly there was a noise of wheels outside, and both the children turned to look out of the window.

"A carriage! a carriage!" shouted Olly, jumping down and running to the window.

There, indeed, was one of the shut-up "cars," as the Westmoreland people call them, coming up the Ravensnest drive.

"It's Aunt Emma," said Mrs. Norton, starting up; "how good of her to come over on such a day! Run, children, and open the front door."

Down flew Milly and Olly, tumbling over one another in their hurry; but father had already thrown the door open, and who should they see stepping down the carriage steps but Aunt Emma herself, with her soft grey hair shining under her veil, and her dear, kind face as gentle and cheery as ever.

"Aunt Emma! Aunt Emma!" shouted Olly, dancing up to her and throwing his arms round her, "*are* you come to tell us about old Mother Quiverquake?"

"You gipsy, don't strangle me! Well, Lucy dear, here I am. Will you have me to dinner? I thought we'd all be company for each other this bad day. Why, Milly, what have you been doing to your cheeks?"

"She's been crying," said Olly, in spite of Milly's pulling him by the sleeve to be quiet, "because I stickened her doll."

"Well, and quite right too. Dolls weren't made to be stickied. But now, who's going to carry my bag upstairs? Take it gently, Milly; it's got my cap inside, and if you crumple my cap I shall have to sit with my head in a bandbox at dinner. Old ladies are *never* seen without their caps, you know. The most dreadful things would happen if they were! Olly, you may put my umbrella away. There, now, I'll go to mother's room and take off my things."

CHAPTER VII

A STORY-TELLING GAME

WHEN Aunt Emma was safely settled, cap and all, in one of the drawing-room armchairs, it seemed to the children as if the rain and the grey sky did not matter nearly so much as they had done half an hour before. In the first place, her coming made something new and interesting to think about; and in the second place, they felt quite sure that Aunt Emma hadn't brought her little black bag into the drawing-room with her for nothing. If only her cap had been in it, why of course she would have left it in mother's bedroom. But here it was in her lap, with her two hands folded tight over it, as if it contained something precious! How very puzzling and interesting!

However, for a long time it seemed as if

Aunt Emma had nothing at all to say about her bag. She began to tell them about her drive—how in two places the horse had to go splashing through the water, and how once, when they were crossing a little river that ran across the road, the water came so far up the wheels that "I put my head out of window," said Aunt Emma, "and said to my old coachman, 'Now, John, if it's going to get any deeper than this you'd better turn him round and go home, for I'm an old woman, not a fish, and I can't swim. Of course, if the horse can swim with the carriage behind him it's all right, but I have my doubts.' Now John, my dears, has been with me a great many years, and he knows very well that I'm rather a nervous old woman. It's very sad, but it is so. Don't you be nervous when you're old people. So all he said was, 'All right, ma'am. Bless you, he can swim like a trout.' And crack went the whip, splash went the water! It seemed to me it was just going to come in under the door, when, lo and behold! there we were safe and sound on dry ground again. But whether my old horse swam through or walked through I can't tell you. I like to believe he swam, because I'm so fond of him, and one likes to believe the creatures one loves can do clever things."

"I'll ask John when he comes to take you away, Aunt Emma," said Olly. "I don't believe horses can swim when they're in a carriage."

"You're a matter-of-fact monkey," said Aunt Emma. "Dear me, what's that?"

For a loud squeak had suddenly startled the children, who were now looking about them everywhere in vain to find out where it came from. Squeak! again. This time the voice certainly came from near Aunt Emma's chair, but there was nothing to be seen.

"What a strange house you live in!" said Aunt Emma, with a perfectly grave face. "You must have caught a magician somehow. That's a magician's squeak."

Again came the noise!

"I know, I know!" shouted Olly. "It's Aunt Emma's bag! I'm sure it came out of the bag."

"My bag!" holding it up and looking at it. "Now does it look like a bag that squeaks?

It's a perfectly well-behaved bag, and never did such a thing in its life."

"I know, Aunt Emma," said Olly, dancing round her in great excitement. "You've got the parrot in there!"

"Well, now," said Aunt Emma, "this is really serious. If you think I am such a cruel old woman as to shut up a poor poll-parrot in a bag, there's no help for it, we must open the bag. But it's a very curious bag—I wouldn't stand too near it if I were you!"

Click! went the fastening of the bag, and out jumped—what do you think? Why, the very biggest frog that was ever seen, in this part of the world at any rate—a green speckled frog, that hopped on to Aunt Emma's knee, and then on to the floor, where it went hopping and squeaking along the carpet, till all of a sudden, when it got to the door, it turned over on its back, and lay there quite quiet with its legs in the air.

The children followed it with looks half of horror, half of amazement.

"What is it, Aunt Emma? Is it alive?" asked Milly, jumping on to a chair as the frog came near her and drawing her little skirts

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

OLLY WENT CAUTIOUSLY AFTER IT.

tight round her legs, while Olly went cautiously after it, with his hands on his knees, one step at a time.

"You'd better ask it," said Aunt Emma, who had at last begun to laugh a little, as if it was impossible to keep grave any longer. "I'm sure it looks very peaceable just now, poor thing!"

So the children crept up to it, and examined it closely. Yes, it was a green speckled frog, but what it was made of, and whether it was alive, and if it was not alive how it managed to hop and squeak—these were the puzzles.

"Take hold of it, Milly," said Mr. Norton, who had just come up from his work and was standing laughing near the door. "Turn it over on its legs again."

"No, I'll turn it," cried Olly, making a dash and turning it over in a great hurry, keeping his legs and feet well out of the way. Hop! squeak! there it was off again, right down the room, with the children after it, till it came suddenly up against a table leg, and once more turned over on its back and lay quite still.

"Oh, Aunt Emma, is it a toy?" asked Milly, who now felt brave enough to take it up and look at it.

"Well, Milly, I believe so—a very lively one. Bring it here, and I'll tell you something about it."

So the children brought it very cautiously, as if they were not quite sure what it would do next, and then Aunt Emma explained to them that she had once paid a visit to a shop in London where Japanese toys—toys made in the country of Japan, far away on the other side of the world—were sold, and that there she found master froggy.

"And there never was such a toy as froggy for a wet day," said Aunt Emma. "I have tried him on all sorts of boys and girls, and he never fails. He's as good a cure for a cross face as a poultice is for a sore finger. But, Milly—listen! I declare there's something else going on in my bag. I really think, my dear bag, you might be quiet now that you have got rid of froggy! What can all this chattering be about? Sh! Sh!" and Aunt Emma held up her finger at the children, while she held the bag up to her ear and listened carefully. Olly was almost beside himself with excitement, but Milly had got his little brown hands tight in hers, for fear he should make a jump at the bag. "Yes," said Aunt Emma, "it's just as I thought. The bag declares it's not his fault at all, but that if I will give him such noisy creatures to carry I must take the consequences. He says there's a whole family now inside him making such a noise he can hardly hear himself speak. It's enough, he says, to drive a respectable bag mad, and he must blow up if it goes on. Dear me! I must look into this. Milly, come here!"

Milly came near, and Aunt Emma opened the bag solemnly.

"Now, Milly, I'll hold it for fear it should take it into its poor head to blow up, and you put your hand in and see what you can find."

So Milly put her hand in, feeling a good deal excited as to what might happen—and what do you think she brought out? A whole handful of the most delicious dolls—cardboard dolls of all sorts and kinds, like those in mother's drawer at home: paper dolls, mamma dolls, little boy dolls and little girl dolls, baby dolls and nurse dolls, dolls in suits and dolls in frocks, dolls in hats and dolls in nightgowns, a papa in trousers and a mamma in a magnificent blue dress with flounces and a train, a nurse in white cap and apron and the most bewitching baby doll you ever saw, with a frilled paper cap that slipped on and off and a white frock with pink ribbons. And the best of these dolls was that each of them had a piece of cardboard fastened on behind and a little bit of cardboard to stand on, so that when you spread out the piece behind they stood up as naturally as possible and looked as if they were going to talk to you.

"Oh, Aunt Emma, dear Aunt Emma!" cried Milly, beside herself with delight as she spread them all out in her lap, "they're just like mother's at home—mother's that you made for her when she was a little girl—only ever so many more."

"Well, Milly, I made mother's for her long ago, when it rained for days and days without stopping and she had grown tired of pretty nearly everything and everybody indoors, and now I have been spending part of these rainy days in making a new set for mother's little girl. There, dear little woman, I think you must have given me a kiss for each of them by this time. Suppose you try and make them stand up."

"But, Aunt Emma," said Olly, who was busy examining the mysterious bag, "how could the dolls talk? They're only paper."

"I know nothing about it," answered Aunt Emma, rescuing the bag and putting it safely under her chair. "You *might* ask the bag—but it wouldn't answer you. Magical bags never do talk except to their masters or mistresses."

So Olly had to puzzle it out for himself while he played with the Japanese frog. That was an extraordinary frog! You should have seen nurse's start when Olly hid himself in the passage and sent the frog hopping and squeaking through the open door of the night nursery, where nurse was sitting sewing; and as for cook, when the creature came flopping over her kitchen floor she very nearly spoilt the hash she was making for dinner by dropping a whole pepper-box into the middle of it! There was no end to the fun to be got out of froggy, and Olly amused himself with it the whole of the morning, while Milly went through long stories with her dolls upstairs, helped every now and then by Aunt Emma, who sat knitting and talking to mother.

At dinner the children had to sit quiet while Mr. and Mrs. Norton and Aunt Emma talked. Father and mother had been almost as much cheered up by Aunt Emma's coming as the children themselves, and now the dinner-table was lively with pleasant talk—talk about books, and talk about pictures, and talk about foreign places, and talk about the mountains and the people living near Ravensnest, many of whom mother had known when she was a little girl. Milly, who was old enough to listen, could only understand a little bit here and there, but there was always Aunt Emma's friendly, gentle face to look at and Aunt Emma's soft hand in its black mitten to slip her own little fingers into, while Olly was so taken up with the prospects of the black currant pudding which he had seen cook making in the morning and the delight of it when it came that it seemed no trouble to him to sit still.

As for the rain, there was not much difference. Perhaps there were a few breaks in the clouds, and it might be beating a little less heavily on the glass conservatory outside the dining-room; still, on the whole, the weather was much the same as it had been. It was wonderful to see how little notice the children had taken of it since Aunt Emma came, and when they escorted her upstairs after dinner they quite forgot to rush to the window and look out, as they had been doing the last three days at every possible opportunity.

The children got her safe into a chair, and then Olly brought a stool to one side of her and Milly brought a stool to the other.

"*Now*, can you remember about old Mother Quiverquake?" said Olly, resting his little sunburnt chin on Aunt Emma's knee and looking up to her with eager eyes.

"Well, I daresay I shall begin to remember about her presently, but suppose, children, we have a *story-telling game!* We'll tell stories—you and Olly, father, mother, and everybody. That's much fairer than that one person should do all the telling."

"We couldn't," said Milly, shaking her head gravely. "We are only little children. Little children can't make up stories."

"Suppose little children try," said mother. "I think Aunt Emma's is an excellent plan. Now, father, you'll have to tell one, too."

"Father's lazy," said Mr. Norton, coming out from behind his newspaper. "But, perhaps, if you all of you tell very exciting stories you may stir him up."

"Oh, father," cried Olly, who had a vivid remembrance of his father's stories, though they only came very seldom, "tell us about the rat with three tails and the dog that walked on its nose."

"Oh dear, no!" said Mr. Norton; "those won't do for such a grand story-telling as this. I must think of some story which is all long words and good children."

"*Don't*, father," said Milly imploringly; "it's ever so much nicer when they get into scrapes, you know, and tumble down, and all that."

"Who's to begin?" said Aunt Emma. "I

think mother had better begin. Afterwards it will be your turn, Olly; then father, then Milly, and then me."

"I don't believe I've got a scrap of a story in my head," said Mrs. Norton. "It's weeks since I caught one last."

"Then look here, Olly," said Aunt Emma, "I'll tell you what to do. Go up gently behind mother and kiss her three times on the top of the head. That's the way to send the stories in. Mother will soon begin to feel one fidgeting inside her head after that."

So Olly went gently up behind his mother, climbed on a stool at the back of her chair, and kissed her softly three times at the back of her head. Mrs. Norton lay still for a few moments after the kisses with closed eyes.

"Ah!" she said at last. "Now I think I've caught one. But it's a very little one, poor little thing! And yet, strange to say, though it's very little, it's very old. Now, children, you must be kind to my story. I caught him first a great many years ago in an old book, but I am afraid you will hardly care for him as much as I did. Well, once upon a time there was a great king."

"Was it King Arthur, mother?" interrupted Olly eagerly.

"Oh no! this king lived in a different country altogether. He lived in a beautiful hot country over the sea, called Spain."

"Oh, mother! a *hot* country!" protested Milly; "that's where the rain goes to."

"Well, Milly, I don't think you know any more about it, except that you *tell* the rain to go there. Don't you know by this time that the rain never does what it's told? Really, very little rain goes to Spain, and in some parts of the country the people would be exceedingly glad if we could send them some of the rain we don't want at Ravensnest. But now, you mustn't interrupt me, or I shall forget my story. Well, there was once a king who lived in a *very* hot part of Spain, where they don't have much rain, and where it hardly ever snows or freezes. And this king had a beautiful wife, whom he loved very much. But, unluckily, this beautiful wife had one great fault. She was always wishing for the most unreasonable and impossible things, and though the king was always trying to get her what she wanted she was never satisfied, and every day she seemed to grow more and more discontented and exacting. At last, one day in the winter, a most extraordinary thing happened. A shower of snow fell in Cordova, which was the name of the town where the king and queen lived, and it whitened the hills all round the town, so that they looked as if somebody had been dusting white sugar over them. Now snow was hardly ever seen in Cordova, and the people in the town wondered at it, and talked about it a great deal. But after she had looked at it a little while the queen began to cry bitterly. None of her ladies could comfort her, nor would she tell any of them what was the matter. There she sat at her window, weeping, till the king came to see her. When he came he could not imagine what she was crying about, and begged her to tell him why. 'I am weeping,' she said, sobbing all the time, 'because the hills—are not always—covered with snow. See how pretty they look! And yet—I have never, till now, seen them look like that. If you really loved me, you would manage some way or other that it should snow once a year at any rate.'

"'But how can I make it snow?' cried the king in great trouble, because she would go on weeping and weeping and spoiling her pretty eyes.

"'I'm sure I don't know,' said the queen crossly, 'but you can't love me a bit, or you'd certainly try.'

"Well, the king thought and thought, and at last he hit upon a beautiful plan. He sent into all parts of Spain to buy almond-trees, and planted them on the hills all round the town. Now the almond-tree, as you know, has a lovely pinky-white blossom, so when the next spring arrived all these thousands of almond-trees came out into bloom all over the hills round Cordova, so that they looked at a distance as if they were covered with white snow. And for once the queen was delighted, and could not help saying a nice 'Thank you' to the king for all the trouble he had taken to please her. But it was not very long before she grew discontented again, and began once more to wish for all kinds of ridiculous things. One day she was sitting at her window, and she saw some ragged little children playing by the river that ran round the palace. They were dabbling in the mud at the side, sticking their little bare feet into it, or scooping up pieces which they rolled into balls and threw at one another. The queen watched them for some time, and at last she began to weep bitterly. One of her maidens ran and told the king that the queen was weeping, and he came in a great hurry to see what was the matter.

"'Just look at those children down there!' said the queen, sobbing and pointing to them. 'Did you ever see anybody so happy? Why can't I have mud to dabble in too, and why can't *I* take off my shoes and stockings and amuse myself like the children do, instead of being so dull and stuck-up all day long?'

"'Because it isn't proper for queens to dabble in the mud,' said the poor king in great perplexity, for he didn't at all like the idea of his beautiful queen dabbling in the mud with the little ragged children.

"'That's just like you,' said the queen, beginning to cry faster than ever, 'you never do anything to please me. What's the good of being proper? What's the good of being a queen at all?'

"This made the king very unhappy, and again he thought and thought, till at last he hit upon a plan. He ordered a very large shallow bath of white marble to be made in the palace garden. Then he poured into it all kinds of precious stones, and chips of sweet smelling wood, besides a thousand cartloads of rose leaves and a thousand cartloads of orange flowers. All these he ordered to be stirred up together with a great ivory spoon, till they made a kind of wonderful mud, and then he had the bath filled up with scented water.

"'Now then,' he said to the queen when he had brought her down to look at it, 'you may take off your shoes and stockings and paddle about in this mud as much as you like.' You may imagine that this was a very pleasant kind of mud to dabble in, and the queen and her ladies amused themselves with it immensely for some time. But nothing could keep this tiresome queen amused for long together, and in about a fortnight she had grown quite tired of her wonderful bath. It seemed as if the king's pains had been all thrown away. She grew cross and discontented again, and her ladies

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

"NOW THEN," HE SAID TO THE QUEEN, "YOU MAY TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES AND STOCKINGS, AND PADDLE ABOUT THIS MUD AS MUCH AS YOU LIKE."

began to say to each other, 'What will she wish for next, I wonder. The king might as well try to drink up the sea as try to get her all she wants.' At last, one day, when she and her ladies were walking near the palace, they met a shepherdess driving a flock of sheep up into the hills. The shepherdess looked so pretty and bright in her red petticoat and tall yellow cap that the queen stopped to speak to her.

"'Where are you going, pretty maiden, with your woolly white sheep?' she asked.

"'I am going up to the hills,' said the shepherdess. 'Now the sun has scorched up the fields down below we must take our sheep up to the cool hills, where the grass is still fresh and green. Good-day, good-day, the sheep are going so fast I cannot wait.'

"So on she tripped, singing and calling to her sheep, who came every now and then to rub their soft coats against her, as if they loved her. The queen looked after her, and her face began to pucker up.

"'Why am I not a shepherdess?" she exclaimed, bursting into tears. 'I *hate* being a queen. I never sang as merrily as that little maiden in all my life. I must and will be a shepherdess, and drive sheep up into the mountain, or I shall die!'

"And all that night the foolish queen sat at her window crying, and when the morning came she had made herself look quite old and ugly. When the king came to see her he was dreadfully troubled, and begged her to tell him what was the matter now.

"'I want to be a shepherdess and drive sheep up into the mountains,' sobbed the queen. 'Why should the little shepherdess girls look always so happy and merry, while I am dying of dulness?'

"The king thought it was very unkind of her to say she was dying of dulness when he had taken so much trouble to get her all she wanted; but he knew it was no good talking to her while she was in such a temper. So all he said was:

"'How can I turn you into a shepherdess? These shepherdesses stay out all night with their sheep on the hills, and live on water and a crust of bread. How would you like that?'

"'Of course I should like it!' said the

queen; 'anything for a change! Besides, nothing could be nicer than staying out-of-doors these lovely nights. And as for food, you know very well that I am never hungry here, and that it doesn't matter in the least to me what I eat!'

"'Well,' said the king, 'you shall go up to the hills, if you promise to take your ladies with you, and if you will let me send a tent to shelter you at night, and some servants to look after you.'

"'As if that would give me any pleasure!' said the queen; 'to be followed about and waited upon is just what I detest. I will go alone, just like that pretty little shepherdess, if I go at all.'

"But the king declared that nothing would induce him to let her go alone. So the queen set to work to cry, and she cried for two days and two nights without stopping; and at the end of that time the poor king was ready to let her go anywhere or do anything for the sake of a little peace.

"So she had her own way. They found her a flock of the loveliest white sheep, all with blue ribbons round their necks and blue rosettes on their little white tails; and the queen dressed herself up in a red silk petticoat and a cap embroidered in gold and silver, and then she set out by herself.

"At first it was all delightful. She drove the sheep up the soft green hillsides, and laughed with delight to see them nibbling the fresh grass, and running hither and thither after her and after each other. The evening sun shone brightly, and she sat herself down on a rock and sang all the tunes she knew, that she might be just like the little shepherdess. But while she was singing the sheep strayed away, and she had to run after them as fast as she could to catch them up. This made her hot and tired; so she tried to make them lie down under a chestnut-tree that she might rest beside them. But the sheep were not a bit tired, and had no mind to rest at all. While she was calling one set of them together the other set ran scampering off, and the queen found out that she must just give up her way for once and follow theirs. On went the sheep, up hill and down dale, nibbling and frisking and trotting to their heart's content, till the queen was worn out.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

"SHE DROVE THE SHEEP UP THE SOFT GREEN HILLSIDES."

"At last, by the time the sun was setting, the poor queen was so tired that she could walk no longer. Down she sat, and the ungrateful sheep kicked up their little hind legs and trotted away out of sight as fast as they could trot. There she was left on the hillside all alone. It began to get dark, and the sky, instead of being blue and clear as it had been, filled with black clouds.

"'Oh dear! oh dear!' sighed the queen, 'here is a storm coming. If I could only find my way down the hill! If I could only see the town!'

"But there were trees all about her, which hid the view, and soon it was so dark there was nothing to be seen—not even the stars. And presently, crash came the thunder, and after the thunder the rain—such rain! It soaked the queen's golden cap till it was so heavy with water she was obliged to throw it away, and her silk petticoat was as wet as if she had been taking a bath in it. In vain she ran hither and thither trying to find a way through the trees, while the rain blinded her and the thunder deafened her, till at last she was forced to sink down on the ground, feeling more wretched and frightened and cold than any queen ever felt before. Oh! if she were only safe back in her beautiful palace! If only she had the tent the king wanted to send with her! But there all night she had to stay; and all night the storm went on, till the queen was lying in a flood, and the owls and bats, startled out of their holes, went flying past her in the dark, and frightening her out of her senses. When the morning came there was such a shivering, crumpled-up queen sitting on the grass, that even her own ladies would scarcely have known her.

"'Oh, husband! husband!' she cried, getting up and wringing her cold little hands. 'You will never find me, and your poor wicked wife will die of cold and hunger.'

"'Tirra-lirra! tirra-lirra!' What was that sounding in the forest? Surely—surely—it was a hunting-horn. But who could be blowing it so early in the cold, gray morning, when it was scarcely light? On ran the queen towards where the sound came from. Over rocks and grass she ran, till, all of a sudden, stepping out from behind a tree, came the king himself, who had been looking for her for hours. And then what do you think the discontented queen did? She folded her hands, and hung her head, and said, quite sadly and simply:

"'Oh, my lord king, make me a shepherdess really. I don't deserve to be a queen. Send me away, and let me knit and spin for my living. I have plagued you long enough.'

"And suddenly it seemed to the king as if there had been a black speck in the queen's heart, which had been all washed away by the rain; and he took her hands and led her home to the palace in joy and gladness. And so they lived happy ever afterwards."

"Thank you *very* much, mother," said Milly, stretching up her arms and drawing down Mrs. Norton's face to kiss her. "Do you really think the queen was never discontented any more?"

"I can't tell you any more than the story does," said Mrs. Norton. "You see, there would always be that dreadful night to think about, if she ever felt inclined to be; but I daresay the queen didn't find it very easy at first."

"I would have made her be a shepherdess," said Olly, shaking his head gravely. "She wasn't nice, not a bit."

"Little Mr. Severity!" said Aunt Emma, pulling his brown curls. "It's your turn next, Olly."

"Then Milly must kiss me first," said Olly, looking rather scared, as if something he didn't quite understand was going to happen to him.

So Milly went through the operation of kissing him three times on the back of the head, and then Olly's eyes, finding it did no good to stare at Aunt Emma or mother, went wandering all round the room in search of something else to help him. Suddenly they came to the window, where a brown speck was dancing up and down; and then Olly's face brightened, and he began in a great hurry:

"Once upon a time there was a daddy-longlegs——"

"Well?" said Milly, when they had waited a little while and nothing more came.

"I don't know any more," said Olly.

"Oh, that *is* silly," said Milly; "why, that isn't a story at all! Shut your eyes tight—that's much the best way of making a story."

So Olly shut his eyes, and pressed his two hands tightly over them, and then he began again:

"Once upon a time there was a daddy-longlegs——"

Another stop.

"Was it a *good* daddy-longlegs?" asked Milly, anxious to help him on.

"Yes," said Olly, "that's it, Milly. Once upon a time there was a good daddy-longlegs——"

"Well, what did he do?" asked Milly impatiently.

"He—he—flewed on to father's nose!" said Olly, keeping his hands tight over his eyes, while his little white teeth appeared below in a broad grin.

"And father said, 'Who's that on my nose?' and the daddy-longlegs said, 'It's me, don't you know?' And father said, 'Get away off my nose, I don't like you a bit.' And the daddy-longlegs said, 'I shan't go away. It's hot on the window; the sun gets in my eyes. I like sitting up here best.' So father took a big sofa-cushion and gave his nose *ever* such a bang! And the daddy-longlegs tumbled down dead. And the cushion tumbled down dead. And father tumbled down dead. And that's all," said Olly, opening his eyes and looking extremely proud of himself.

"Oh, you silly boy!" cried Milly, "that isn't a bit like a real story."

But Aunt Emma and father and mother laughed a good deal at Olly's story, and Aunt Emma said it would do very well for such a small boy.

Whose turn was it next?

"Father's turn! father's turn!" cried the children in great glee, looking round for him; but while Olly's story had been going on, Mr. Norton, who was sitting behind them in a big arm-chair, had been covering himself up with sofa cushions and newspapers, till there was only the tip of one of his boots to be seen coming out from under the heap. The children were a long time dragging him out, for he pelted them with cushions and crumpled the newspapers over their heads, till they

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

MR. NORTON COULD NOT RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO THROW ONE MORE SOFA CUSHION AT HER LAUGHING FACE.

were so tired with laughing and struggling they had no strength left.

"Father, it isn't fair, I don't think," said Milly at last, sitting a breathless heap on the floor. "Of course little people can't *make* big people do things, so the big people ought to do them without making."

"That's not at all good reasoning, Milly," said Mr. Norton, who could not resist the temptation of throwing one more sofa cushion at her laughing face. "You can't *make* nurse stand on her head, but that's no reason why nurse should stand on her head."

Just then Olly, moving up a stool behind his father's chair, brought his little mouth suddenly down on his father's head and gave him three kisses in a great hurry, with a shout of triumph at the end.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Norton, shutting his eyes and falling back as if something had happened to him. "This is very serious, Aunt Emma, that spell of yours is really *too* strong. My poor head! It will certainly burst if I don't get this story out directly! Come, jump up, children—quick!"

Up jumped the children, one on each knee, and Mr. Norton began at once.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STORY OF BEOWULF

"ONCE upon a time there was a great——"

"Father," interrupted Milly, "I shall soon be getting tired of 'Once upon a time there was a great king.'"

"Don't cry till you're hurt, Milly; which means, wait till I get to the end of my sentence. Well, once upon a time there was a great—hero."

"What is a hero?" asked Olly.

"I know," said Milly eagerly; "it's a brave man that's always fighting, and killing giants and dragons and cruel people."

"That'll do to begin with," said Mr. Norton; "though, when you grow older, you will find that people can be heroes without fighting or killing. However, the man I am going to tell you about was just the kind of hero you're thinking of, Milly. He loved fighting with giants and dragons and wild people, and my story is going to be about two of his fights—the greatest he ever fought. The name of this hero was Beowulf, and he lived in a country called Sweden (Milly knows all about Sweden, Olly, and you must get her to show it you on the map), with a number of other brave men who were his friends and helped him in his battles.

"And one day a messenger came over the sea from another country close by, called Denmark, and the messenger said, 'Which of all you brave men will come over and help my master, King Hrothgar, who is in sore trouble?' And the messenger told them how Hrothgar, for many years past, had been plagued by a monster—the hateful monster Grendel, half a man and half a beast, who lived at the bottom of a great bog near the king's palace. Every night, he said, Grendel the monster came out of the bog with his horrible mother beside him—a wolf-like creature, fearful to look upon—and he and she would roam about the country, killing and slaying all whom they met. Sometimes they would come stalking to the king's palace, where his brave men were sleeping round the fire in the big hall, and before any one could withstand him Grendel would fall upon the king's warriors, kill them by tens and twenties, and carry off their dead bodies to his bog. Many a brave man had tried to slay the monster, but none had been able so much as to wound him.

"When Beowulf and his friends had heard this story they thought a while, and then each said to the other, 'Let us go across the sea and rid King Hrothgar of this monster.' So they took ship and went across the sea to Hrothgar's country, and Hrothgar welcomed them royally, and made a great feast in their honour. And after the feast Hrothgar said to Beowulf, 'Now, I give over to you the hall of my palace, that you may guard it against the monster.' So Beowulf and the brave men who had come over with him made a great fire in the hall, and they all lay down to sleep beside it. You may imagine that they did not find it very easy to get to sleep, and some

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

"THEY FOUGHT TILL THE BENCHES WERE TORN FROM THE WALLS."

of them thought as they lay there that very likely they should never see their homes in Sweden again. But they were tired with journeying and feasting, and one after another they all fell asleep. Then in the dead of the night, when all was still, Grendel rose up out of the bog and came stalking over the moor to the palace. His eyes flamed with a kind of horrible light in the darkness, and his steps seemed to shake the earth; but those inside the palace were sleeping so heavily that they heard nothing, not even when Grendel burst open the door of the hall and came in among them. Before any one had wakened, the monster had seized one of the sleeping men and torn him to pieces. Then he came to Beowulf; but Beowulf sprang up out of his sleep and laid hold upon him boldly. He used no sword to strike him, for there was no sword which men could make was strong enough to hurt Grendel; but he seized him with his strong hands, and the two struggled together in the palace. And they fought till the benches were torn from the walls, and everything in the hall was smashed and broken. The brave men, springing up all round, seized their swords and would gladly have helped their lord, but there was no one but Beowulf could harm Grendel.

"So they fought, till at last Beowulf tore away Grendel's hand and arm, and the monster fled away howling into the darkness. Over the moor he rushed till he came to his bog, and there he sank down into the middle of the bog, wailing and shrieking like one whose last hour was come. Then there was great rejoicing at Heorot, the palace; and King Hrothgar, when he saw Grendel's hand which Beowulf had torn away, embraced him and blessed him, and he and all his friends were laden with splendid gifts.

"But all was not over yet. When the next night came, and Hrothgar's men and Beowulf's men were asleep together in the great hall, Grendel's horrible mother, half a woman and half a wolf, came rushing to the palace; and while they were all asleep she carried off one of Hrothgar's dearest friends—a young noble whom he loved best of all his nobles. And she killed him, and carried his body back to the bog. Then the next morning there was grief and weeping in Heorot; but

Beowulf said to the king, 'Grieve not, O king! till we have found out Grendel's mother and punished her for her evil deeds. I promise you she shall give an account for this. She shall not be able to hide herself in the water, nor under the earth, nor in the forest, nor at the bottom of the sea; let her go where she will, I will find a way after her.'

"So Beowulf and his friends put on their armour and mounted their horses, and set out to look for her. And when they had ridden a long and weary way over steep and lonely paths and past caves where dragons and serpents lived, they came at last to Grendel's bog—a fearful place indeed. There in the middle of it lay a pool of black water, and over the water hung withered trees, which seemed as if they had been poisoned by the air rising from the water beneath them. No bird or beast would ever come near Grendel's pool. If the hounds were hunting a stag and they drove him down to the edge, he would sooner let them tear him to pieces than hide himself in the water. And every night the black water seemed to burn and flame, and it hissed and bubbled and groaned as if there were evil creatures tossing underneath. And now when Beowulf and his men came near it they saw fierce water-dragons lying near the edge or swimming about the pool. There also, beside the water, they found the dead body of Hrothgar's friend, who had been killed by Grendel's mother, and they took it up and mourned over him afresh.

"But Beowulf took an old and splendid sword that Hrothgar had given him, and he put on his golden helmet and his iron war-shirt that no sword could cut through, and when he had bade his friends farewell he leapt straight into the middle of the bog. Down he sank, deeper and deeper into the water, among strange water beasts that struck at him with their tusks as he passed them, till at last Grendel's mother, the water-wolf, looked up from the bottom and saw him coming. Then she sprang upon him, and seized him, and dragged him down; and he found himself in a sort of hall under the water, with a pale, strange light in it. And then he turned upon the horrible water-wolf and raised his sword and struck her on the head; but his blow did her no harm. No

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

"SHE SPRANG UPON BEOWULF AND SEIZED HIM."

sword made by mortal men could harm Grendel or his mother; and as he struck her Beowulf stumbled and fell. Then the water-wolf rushed forward and sat upon him as he lay there, and raised aloft her own sharp dagger to drive it into his breast; but Beowulf shook her off, and sprang up, and there, on the wall, he saw hanging a strange old sword that had been made in the old times, long, long ago, when the world was full of giants. So he threw his own sword aside and took down the old sword, and once more he smote the water-wolf. And this time his sword did him good service, and Grendel's fierce mother sank down dead upon the ground.

"Then Beowulf looked round him, and he saw lying in a corner the body of Grendel himself. He cut off the monster's head, and lo and behold! when he had cut it off the blade of the old sword melted away, and there was nothing left in his hands but the hilt, with strange letters on it, telling how it was made in old days by the giants for a great king. So with that, and Hrothgar's sword and Grendel's head, Beowulf rose up again through the bog, and just as his brave men had begun to think they should never see their dear lord more, he came swimming to land, bearing the great head with him.

"Then Hrothgar and all his people rejoiced greatly, for they knew that the land would never more be troubled by these hateful monsters, but that the ploughers might plough, and the shepherds might lead their sheep, and brave men might sleep at night, without fear any more of Grendel and his mother."

"Oh, father!" said Milly breathlessly, when he stopped. "Is that all?"

But Olly sat quite still without speaking, gazing at his father with wide-open brown eyes, and a face as grave and terrified as if Grendel were actually beside him.

"That's all for this time," said Mr. Norton. "Why, Olly, where are your little wits gone to? Did it frighten you, old man?"

"Oh!" said Olly, drawing a long breath. "I did think he would never have comed up out of that bog!"

"It was splendid," said Milly. "But, father, I don't understand about that pool. Why didn't Beowulf get drowned when he went down under the water?"

"The story doesn't tell us anything about that," said Mr. Norton. "But heroes in those days, Milly, must have had something magical about them, so that they were able to do things that men and women can't do now. Do you know, children, that this story that you have been listening to is more than a thousand years old? Can you fancy that?"

"No," said Milly, shaking her head. "I can't fancy it a bit, father. It's too long. It makes me puzzled to think of so many years."

"Years and years and years and *years!*" said Olly. "When father's grandfather was a little boy?"

Mr. Norton laughed. "Can't you think of anything farther back than that, Olly? It would take a great many grandfathers and grandfathers' grandfathers to get back to the time when the story of Beowulf was made. And here am I telling it to you just in the same way as fathers used to tell it to their children a thousand years ago."

"I suppose the children liked it so, they wouldn't let their fathers forget it," said Milly. "And when they grew up they told it to their children. I shall tell it to my children when I grow up. I think I shall tell it to Katie to-morrow."

"Father," said Olly, "did Beowulf die—ever?"

"Yes; when he was quite an old man he had another great fight with a dragon, who was guarding a cave full of golden treasure on the seashore; and though he killed the dragon, the dragon gave him a terrible wound, so that when his friends came to look for him they found him lying all but dead in the cave. He was just able to tell them to make a great mound of earth over him when he was dead, on a high rock close by, that sailors might see it from their ships and think of him when they saw it, and then he died. And when he was dead they carried him up to the rock, and there they burned his body, and then they built up a great, high mound of earth, and they put Beowulf's bones inside, and all the treasure from the dragon's cave. They were ten days building up the mound. Then when it was all done they rode round it weeping and chanting sorrowful songs, and at last they left him there, saying as they went away that never should they see so good a king or so true a master any more. And for hundreds of years afterwards, when the sailors out at sea saw the high mound rising on its point of rock, they said one to another, 'There is Beowulf's Mount,' and they began to tell each other of Beowulf's brave deeds—how he lived and how he died, and how he fought with Grendel and the wild sea-dragons. There, now, I have told you all I know about Beowulf," said Mr. Norton, getting up and turning the children off his knee, "and if it isn't somebody else's turn now it ought to be."

"Aunt Emma! Aunt Emma!" shouted Olly, who was so greedy for stories that he could almost listen all day long without being tired.

But Aunt Emma only smiled through her spectacles and pointed to the window. The children ran to look out, and they could hardly believe their eyes when they saw that it had actually stopped raining, and that over the tree-tops was a narrow strip of blue sky, the first they had seen for three whole days.

"Oh, you nice blue sky!" exclaimed Milly, dancing up and down before the window with a beaming face. "Mind you stay there and get bigger. We'll get on our hats presently and come out to look at you. Oh! there's John Backhouse coming down the hill with the dogs. Mother, may we go up ourselves and ask Becky and Tiza to come to tea?"

"But Aunt Emma must tell us her story first," persisted Olly, who hated being cheated out of a story by anything or anybody. "She promised."

"You silly boy!" said Aunt Emma, "as if I was going to keep you indoors listening to stories just now, when the sun's shining for the first time for three whole days. I promised you my story on a wet day, and you shall have it—never fear. There'll be plenty more wet days before you go away from Ravensnest, I'm afraid. There goes my knitting, and mother's putting away her work, and father's stretching himself—which means we're all going for a walk."

"To fetch Becky and Tiza, mother?" asked Milly; and when mother said "Yes, if you like," the two children raced off down the long passage to the nursery in the highest possible spirits.

Soon they were all walking along the dripping drive past high banks of wet fern, and under trees which threw down showers of raindrops at every puff of wind. And when they got into the road beside the river the children shouted with glee to see their brown, shallow little river turned into a raging flood of water, which went sweeping and hurrying through the fields, and every now and then spreading itself over them and making great pools among the poor drowned hay. They ran on to look for the stepping-stones, but to their amazement there was not a stone to be seen. The water was rushing over them with a great roar and swirl, and Milly shivered a little bit when she remembered their bathe there a week before.

"Well, old woman," said Mr. Norton, coming up to them, "I don't suppose you'd like a bathe to-day—quite."

"If we were in there now," said Olly, watching the river with great excitement, "the water would push us down krick! and the fishes would come and etten us all up."

"They'd be a long time gobbling you up, Master Fatty," said his father. "Come, run along; it's too cold to stand about."

But how brilliant and beautiful it was after the rain! Little tiny trickling rivers were running down all the roads, and sparkling in the sun; the wet leaves and grass were glittering, and the great mountains all round stood up green and fresh against the blue sky, as if the rain had washed the dust off them from top to toe and left them clean and bright. Two things only seemed the worse for the rain—the hay and the wild strawberries. Milly peered into all the banks along the road where she generally found her favourite little red berries, but most of them were washed away, and the few miserable things that were left tasted of nothing but rain-water. And as for the hayfields, they looked so wet and drenched that it was hard to believe any sunshine could ever dry them.

"Poor John Backhouse!" said Aunt Emma. "I'm afraid his hay is a good deal spoilt. Aren't you glad father's not a farmer, Milly?"

"Why, Aunt Emma," said Milly, "I'm always wishing father *was* a farmer. I want to be like Becky, and call the cows and mind the baby all by myself. It must be nice feeding the chickens, and making the hay, and taking the milk round."

"Yes, all that's very nice, but how would you like your hay washed away, and your corn beaten down, and your fruit all spoilt? Those are things that are constantly happening to John Backhouse, I expect, in the rainy country."

"Yes; and it won't always be summer," said Milly, considering. "I don't think I should like to stay in that little weeny house all the winter. Is it very cold here in the winter, Aunt Emma?"

"Not very, generally. But last winter was very cold here, and the snow lay on the ground for weeks and weeks. On Christmas Eve, do you know, Milly, I wanted to have a children's party in my kitchen, and what do you think I did? The snow was lying deep on the roads, so I sent out two sledges."

"What are sledges?" asked Olly.

"Carriages with the wheels taken off and two long pieces of wood fastened on instead, so that they slip along smoothly over the snow. And my old coachman drove one and my gardener the other, and they went round all the farmhouses near by and gathered up the children, little and big, into the sledges, till the coachman had got eight in his sledge and the gardener had got nine in his, and then they came trotting back with the bells round the horses' necks jingling and clattering, and two such merry loads of rosy-faced children. I wish you had been there; I gave them tea in the kitchen, and afterwards we had a Christmas-tree in the drawing-room."

"Oh! what fun," said Milly. "Why didn't you ask us too, Aunt Emma? We could have come quite well in the train, you know. But how did the children get home?"

"We covered them up warm with rugs and blankets, and sent them back in the sledges. And they looked so happy with their toys and buns cuddled up in their arms that it did one's heart good to see them."

"Mind you ask us next time, Aunt Emma," said Milly, hanging round her neck coaxingly.

"Mind you get two pairs of wings by that time, then," said Aunt Emma, "for mother's not likely to let you come to my Christmas-tree unless you promise to fly there and back.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

OUT RUSHED A TATTERED LITTLE FIGURE WITH A TEAR-STAINED FACE.

But suppose, instead of your coming to me, I come to you next Christmas?"

"Oh! yes! yes!" cried Olly, who had just joined Aunt Emma and Milly, "come to our Christmas-tree, Aunt Emma. We'll give you ever such nice things—a ball and a top and a train—perhaps—and——"

"As if Aunt Emma would care for those kind of things!" said Milly. "No, you shall give her some muffatees, you know, to keep her hands warm, and I'll make her a needle-book. But, Aunt Emma, do listen! What can be the matter?"

They were just climbing the little bit of steep road which led to the farm, and suddenly they heard somebody roaring and screaming, and then an angry voice scolding, and then a great clatter, and then louder roaring than ever.

"What *is* the matter?" cried Milly, running on to the farm door, which was open. But just as she got there out rushed a tattered little figure with a tear-stained face, and hair flying behind.

"Tiza!" cried Milly, trying to stop her. But Tiza ran past her as quick as lightning down the garden path towards the cherry-tree, and in another minute, in spite of the shower of wet she shook down on herself as she climbed up, she was sitting high and safe among the branches, where there was no catching her nor even seeing her.

"Ay, that's the best place for ye," said Mrs. Backhouse, appearing at the door with an angry face; "you'll not get into so much mischief there, perhaps, as you will indoors. Oh, is that you, Miss Elliot?" (that was Aunt Emma's surname). "Walk in, please, ma'am, though you'll find me sadly untidy this afternoon. Tiza's been at her tricks again; she keeps me sweeping up after her all day. Just look here, if you please, ma'am."

Aunt Emma went in, and the children pressed in after her, full of curiosity to see what crime Tiza had been committing. Poor Mrs. Backhouse! All over her clean kitchen floor there were streams of water running about, with little pieces of cabbage and carrot sticking up in them here and there, while on the kitchen table lay a heap of meat and vegetables which Mrs. Backhouse had evidently just picked up out of the grate before Aunt Emma and the children arrived.

"Yes," said Mrs. Backhouse, pointing to the floor, "there's the supper just spoilt. Tiza's never easy but when she's in mischief. I'm sure these wet days I haven't known what to do with her indoors all day. And what must she do this afternoon but tie her tin mug to the cat's tail, till the poor creature was nearly beside herself with fright and went rushing about upstairs like a mad thing. And then, just when I happened to be out a minute looking after something, she lets the cat in here, and the poor thing jumps into the saucepan I had just put on with the broth for our supper, and in her fright and all turns it right over. And now look at my grate, and the fender, and the floor, and the meat there all messed! I expect her father 'll give Tiza a good beating when he comes in, and I'm sure I shan't stand in the way."

"Oh no, please, Mrs. Backhouse!" said Milly, running up to her with a grave, imploring little face. "Don't let Mr. Backhouse beat her; she didn't mean it—she was only in fun, I'm sure."

"Well, missy, it's very trooblesome fun, I'm sure," said Mrs. Backhouse, patting Milly kindly on the shoulder, for she was a good-natured woman and it wasn't her way to be angry long. "I don't know what I'm to give John for his supper, that I don't. I had nothing in the house but just those little odds and ends of meat that I thought would make a nice bit of broth for supper. And now he'll come in wet and hungry, and there'll be nothing for him. Well, we must do with something else, I suppose, but I expect her father 'll beat her."

Milly and Olly looked rather awestruck at the idea of a beating from John Backhouse, that great, strong, brawny farmer, and Milly, whispering something quickly to Aunt Emma, slipped out into the garden again. By this time father and mother had come up, and Becky appeared from the farmyard, wheeling the baby in a little wooden cart and radiant with pleasure at the sight of Aunt Emma, whose god-child she was, so that Milly's disappearance was not noticed.

She ran down the garden path to the cherry-tree, and as, in the various times they had been together, Becky and Tiza had taught her a good deal of climbing, she, too, clambered up into the wet branches and was soon sitting close by Tiza, who had turned her cotton pinafore over her head and wouldn't look at Milly.

"Tiza," said Milly softly, putting her hand on Tiza's lap, "do you feel very bad?"

No answer.

"We came to take you down to have tea with us," said Milly. "Do you think your mother will let you come?"

"Naw," said Tiza shortly, without moving from behind her pinafore.

It certainly wasn't very easy talking to Tiza. Milly thought she'd better try something else.

"Tiza," she began timidly, "do your father and mother tell you stories when it rains?"

"Naw," said Tiza, in a very astonished voice, throwing down her pinafore to stare at Milly.

"Then what do you do, Tiza, when it rains?"

"Nothing," said Tiza. "We has our dinners and tea, and sometimes Becky minds the baby and sometimes I do, and father mostly goes to sleep."

"Tiza," said Milly hurriedly, "did you *mean* pussy to jump into the saucepan?"

Up went Tiza's pinafore again, and Milly was in dismay, because she thought she had made Tiza cry, but to her great surprise Tiza suddenly burst into such fits of laughter that she nearly tumbled off the cherry-tree.

"Oh, she did jump so, and the mug made such a rattling! And when she comed out there was just a little bit of carrot sticking to her nose and her tail was all over cabbage leaf. Oh, she did look funny!"

Milly couldn't help laughing too, till she remembered all that Mrs. Backhouse had been saying.

"Oh, but, Tiza, Mrs. Backhouse says your father won't have anything for his supper. Aren't you sorry you spoilt his supper?"

"Yis," said Tiza quickly. "I know father 'll beat me; he said he would next time I vexed mother."

And this time the pinafore went up in earnest and Tiza began to cry piteously.

"Don't cry, Tiza," said Milly, her own little cheeks getting wet too. "I'll beg him not. Can't you make up any way? Mother says we must always make up if we can when we've done any harm. I wish I had anything to give you to make up."

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNI

"YOU COME," SHE WHISPERED EAGERLY TO MILLY, PULLING HER BY THE SKIRT.

Tiza suddenly dried her eyes and looked at Milly with a bright expression which was very puzzling.

"You come with me," she said suddenly, swinging herself down from the tree. "Come here by the hedge; don't let mother see us."

So they ran along the far side of the hedge till they got into the farmyard, and then Tiza led Milly past the hen-house up to the corner where the hay-ricks were. In and out of the hay-ricks they went, till in the very farthest corner of all, where hardly anybody ever came and which nobody could see into from the yard, Tiza suddenly knelt down and put her hand under the hay at the bottom of the rick.

"You come," she whispered eagerly to Milly, pulling her by the skirt, "you come and look here."

Milly stooped down, and there in a soft little place, just between the hay-rick and the ground, what do you think she saw? Three large brownish eggs lying in a sort of rough nest in the hay, and looking so round and fresh and tempting that Milly gave a little cry of delight.

"Oh, Tiza, how be-utiful! How did they get there?"

"It's old Sally, our white hen, you know, laid them. I found them just after dinner. Mother doesn't know nothing about them. I never told Becky, nor nobody. Aren't they beauties?"

And Tiza took one up lovingly in her rough little brown hands and laid it against her cheek, to feel how soft and satiny it was.

"Oh, and Tiza, I know," exclaimed Milly eagerly, "you meant these would do for supper. That would be a lovely make-up. There's three. One for Mr. Backhouse, one for Mrs. Backhouse, and one for Becky. There's none for you, Tiza."

"Nor none for Becky neither," answered Tiza shortly. "Father 'll want two. Becky and me'll get bread-and-dripping."

"Well, come along, Tiza, let's take them in."

"No, you take them," said Tiza. "Mother won't want to see me no more, and father 'll perhaps be coming in."

"Oh, but, Tiza, you'll come to tea with us?"

"I don't know," said Tiza. "You ask."

And off she ran as quick as lightning, off to her hiding-place in the cherry-tree, while Milly was left with the three brown eggs, feeling rather puzzled and anxious. However, she put them gently in the skirt of her frock, and holding it up in both hands she picked her way through the wet yard back to the house.

When she appeared at the kitchen door, Aunt Emma and Mrs. Backhouse were chatting quietly. Mr. and Mrs. Norton and Olly had gone on for a little stroll along the Wanwick road, and Becky was sitting on the window-sill with the baby, who seemed very sleepy, but quite determined not to go to sleep in spite of all Becky's rocking and patting.

"Oh, Mrs. Backhouse," began Milly, coming in with a bright, flushed face, "just look here what I've brought. Tiza found them just after dinner to-day. They were under the hay-rick right away in the corner, and she wanted to make up, so she showed me where they were, so I brought them in, and there's two for Mr. Backhouse and one for you, you know. And, please, won't you let Tiza come to tea with us?"

Mrs. Backhouse looked in astonishment at the three eggs lying in Milly's print skirt and at Milly's pleading little face.

"Ay, that's Sally, I suppose. She's always hiding her eggs, is Sally, where I can't find them. So it was Tiza found them, was it, missy? Well, they will come in very handy for supper as it happens. Thank you kindly for bringing them in."

And Mrs. Backhouse took the eggs and put them safely away in a pie-dish, while Becky secretly pulled Milly by the sleeve and smiled up at her, as much as to say, "Thank you for helping Tiza out of her scrape."

"And you'll let Becky and Tiza come to tea?" asked Milly again.

"Well, I'm sure, miss, I don't know," said Mrs. Backhouse, looking puzzled; "Becky may come and welcome, but perhaps it would do Tiza good to stay at home."

"Don't you think she'd better have a little change?" said Aunt Emma in her kind voice, which made Milly want to hug her. "I daresay staying indoors so long made her restless. If you will let me carry them both off, I daresay between us, Mrs. Backhouse, we can give Tiza a talking-to, and perhaps she'll come back in a more sensible mood."

"Well, Miss Elliot, she shall go if you wish it. Come, Becky, give me the baby, and go and put your things on." And then, going to the door, Mrs. Backhouse shouted "Tiza!" After a second or two a little figure dropped down out of the cherry-tree and came slowly up the walk. Tiza had shaken her hair about her face so that it could hardly be seen, and she never looked once at Aunt Emma and Milly as she came up to her mother.

"There, go along, Tiza, and get your things on," said Mrs. Backhouse, taking her by the arm. "I wouldn't have let you go out to tea, you know, if Miss Elliot and missy hadn't asked particular. Mind you don't get into no more mischief. And very like those eggs'll do for father's supper; so, I daresay, I'll not say anything to him this time—just for once. Now go up."

Tiza didn't want to be told twice, and presently—just as Mr. and Mrs. Norton and Olly were coming back from their walk—they met Aunt Emma coming back from the farm holding Becky's hand, while Milly and Tiza walked in front.

"Well, Tiza," said Mr. Norton, patting her curly head, "I declare I think you beat Olly for mischief. Olly never spoilt my dinner yet that I remember. What should I do to him, do you think, if he did?"

"Beat him," said Tiza, looking up at Mr. Norton with her quick, bird-like eyes.

"Oh dear no!" said Mr. Norton, "that wouldn't do my dinner any good. I should eat him up instead."

"I don't believe little boys taste good a bit," said Olly, who always believed firmly in his father's various threats. "If you ettened me, father, you'd be ill."

"Oh no," said Mr. Norton, "not if I eat you with plenty of bread sauce. That's the best way to cook little boys. Now, Milly, which of you three girls can get to that gate first?"

Off ran the three little girls full tilt down the hill leading to Ravensnest, with Olly puffing and panting after them. Milly led the way at first, for she was light and quick and a very fair runner for her age; but Tiza soon got up to her and passed her, and it was Tiza's little stout legs that arrived first at Ravensnest gate.

"Oh, Becky!" said Milly, putting her arms round Becky's neck as they went into the house together, "I hope you may stay a good long time. What time do you go to bed?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Becky. "We go when fayther goes."

"When father goes!" exclaimed Milly. "Why, we go ever so long before father. Why do you stay up so late?"

"Why, it isn't late," said Becky. "Fayther goes to bed, now it's summer time, about half-past eight; but in winter, of course, he goes earlier. And we all goes together, except baby. Mother puts him out of the way before supper."

"Well, but how funny!" said Milly; "I can't think why you should be so different from us."

And Milly went on puzzling over Becky and her going to bed till nurse drove it all out of her head by fetching them to tea. Such a merry tea they had; and after tea a romp in the big kitchen with father, which delighted the little farm-children beyond measure. Some time in the evening, I believe, Aunt Emma managed to give Tiza a little talking-to, but none of the other children knew anything about it, except, perhaps, Becky, who generally knew what was happening to Tiza.

CHAPTER IX

MILLY'S BIRTHDAY AND A MISFORTUNE

NOW we have come to a chapter which is going to be half merry and half sad. I have not told you any sad things about Milly and Olly up till now, I think. They were such happy little people that there was nothing sad to tell you. They cried sometimes, of course—you remember Milly cried when Olly stickied her doll—but generally, by the time they had dried up their tears they had quite forgotten what they were crying about; and as for any real trouble, why they didn't know what it could possibly be like. But now, just as they were going away from Ravensnest, came a real sad thing, and you'll hear very soon how it happened.

After those three wet days it was sometimes fine and sometimes rainy at Ravensnest, but never so rainy as to keep the Nortons in all day. And every now and then there were splendid days when the children and their father and mother were out all day long, wandering over the mountains, or walking over to Aunt Emma's, or tramping along the well-known roads to Wanwick on one side and the little village of Rydal and Rydal Lake on the other. They had another row on Windermere; and one fine evening Mr. Norton borrowed a friend's boat, and they went out fishing for perch on Rydal Lake, the loveliest little lake in the world, lying softly in a green mountain cup, and dotted with islands, which seemed to the children, when they landed on them, like little bits of fairy-land dropped into the blue water.

And then, crown of delights! came the haymaking. There were long, fine days, when the six small creatures—Milly, Olly, Becky, Tiza, Bessie, and Charlie—followed John Backhouse and his men about in the hay-fields from early morning till evening, helping to make the hay or simply rolling about like a parcel of kittens in the flowery, fragrant heaps.

Aunt Emma was often at Ravensnest, and the children learned to love her better and better, so that even wild little Olly would remember to bring her stool, and carry her shawl, and change her plate at dinner; and Milly, who was always clinging to somebody, was constantly puzzled to know whose pocket to sit in, mother's or Aunt Emma's.

Then there was the farmyard, the cows, and the milking, and the chickens. Everything about them seemed delightful to Milly and Olly, and the top of everything was reached when one evening John Backhouse mounted both the children on his big carthorse Dobbin, and they and Dobbin together dragged the hay home in triumph.

And now they had only one week more to stay at Ravensnest. But that week was a most important week, for it was to contain no less a day than Milly's birthday. Milly would be seven years old on July 15th, and for about a week before the 15th Milly's little head could think of nothing else. Olly, too, was very much excited about it, for though Milly, of course, was the queen of the day, and all the presents were for her, not for him, still

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

JOHN BACKHOUSE MOUNTED BOTH THE CHILDREN ON HIS BIG CARTHORSE DOBBIN.

it was good times for everybody on Milly's birthday; besides which, he had his own little secret with mother about his present to Milly —a secret which made him very happy, but which he was on the point of telling at least a hundred times a day.

"Father," said Milly, about four days before the birthday, when they were all wandering about after tea one evening in the high garden, which was now a paradise of ripe red strawberries and fruit of every kind, "does everybody have birthdays? Do policemen have birthdays?"

"I expect so, Milly," said Mr. Norton, laughing, "but they haven't any time to remember them."

"But, father, what's the good of having birthdays if you don't keep them and have presents and all that? And do cats and dogs have birthdays? I should like to find out Spot's birthday. We'd give her cream instead of milk, you know, and I'd tie a blue ribbon round her neck and one round her tail, like the queen's sheep in mother's story."

"I don't suppose Spot would thank you at all," said Mr. Norton. "The cream would make her ill, and the ribbon would fidget her dreadfully till she pulled it off."

"Oh dear!" sighed Milly. "Well, I suppose Spot had better not have any birthday then. But, father, what do you think? Becky and Tiza don't care about their birthdays a bit. Becky could hardly remember when hers was, and they never have any presents unless Aunt Emma gives them one, or people to tea, or anything."

"Well, you see, Milly, when people have only just pennies and shillings enough to buy bread and meat to eat and clothes to put on, they can't go spending money on presents; and when they're very anxious and busy all the year round, they can't be remembering birthdays and taking pains about them like richer people can, who have less to trouble them and whose work does not take up quite so much time."

"Well, but why don't the rich people remember the poor people's birthdays for them, father? Then they could give them presents, and ask them to tea and all, you know."

"Yes, that would be a very good arrangement," said Mr. Norton, smiling at her eager

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

MILLY STOPPED SUDDENLY.

little face. "Only, somehow, Milly, things don't come right like that in this world."

"Well, I'm going to try and remember Becky's and Tiza's birthdays," said Milly. "I'll tell mother to put them down in her pocket-book—won't you, mother? Oh, what fun! I'll send them birthday cards, and they'll be so surprised, and wonder why; and then they'll say, 'Oh, why, of course it's our birthday!' No, not *our* birthday—but you know what I mean, father."

"Well, but, Milly," asked Mrs. Norton, "have you made up your mind what you want to do this birthday?"

Milly stopped suddenly, with her hands behind her, opposite her mother, with her lips tightly pressed together, her eyes smiling, as if there was a tremendous secret hidden somewhere.

"Well, monkey, out with it! What have you got hidden away in your little head?"

"Well, mother," said Milly slowly, "I don't want to *have* anybody to tea. I want to go out to tea with somebody. Now can you guess?"

"With Aunt Emma?"

"Oh no, Aunt Emma's coming over here all day. She promised she would."

"With Becky and Tiza?"

Milly nodded and screwed up her little lips tighter than ever.

"But I don't expect Mrs. Backhouse will want the trouble of having you two to tea."

"Oh, mother, she won't mind a bit! I know she won't, because Becky told me one day her mother would like us very much to come some time, if you'd let us. And Nana could come and help Mrs. Backhouse, and we could all wash up the tea-things afterwards, like we did at the picnic!"

"Then Tiza mustn't sit next me," said Olly, who had been listening in silence to all the arrangements. "She takes away my bread-and-butter when I'm not looking, and I don't like it, not a bit."

"No, Olly, dear, she shan't," said Milly, taking his hand and fondling it, as if she were at least twenty years older. "I'll sit on one side of you and Becky on the other," a prospect with which Olly was apparently satisfied, for he made no more objections.

"Well, you must ask Mrs. Backhouse your-

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

THE SHOPWOMAN WRAPPED IT UP IN A NEAT LITTLE PARCEL.

selves," said Mrs. Norton. "And if it is her washing-day, or inconvenient to her at all, you mustn't think of going, you know."

So early next morning Milly and Nana and Olly went up to the farm, and came back with the answer that Mrs. Backhouse would be very pleased to see them at tea on Thursday, the 15th, and that John Backhouse would have cut the hayfield by the river by then, and they could have a romp in the hay afterwards.

Wednesday was a deeply interesting day to Olly. He and his mother went over by themselves to Wanwick, and they bought something which the shopwoman at the toy-shop wrapped up in a neat little parcel, and which Olly carried home, looking as important as a little king.

"Milly," he began at dinner, "*wouldn't* you like to know about your presents? But of course I shan't tell you about mine. Perhaps I'm not going to give you one at all. Oh, mother," in a loud whisper to Mrs. Norton, "did you put it away safe where she can't see?"

"Oh, you silly boy!" said Milly; "you'll tell me if you don't take care."

"No, I shan't. I wouldn't tell you if you were to go on asking me all day. It isn't very big, you know, Milly, and—and—it isn't pretty outside—only——"

"Be quiet, chatterbox," said Mr. Norton, putting his hand over Olly's mouth; "you'll tell in another minute, and then there'll be no fun to-morrow."

So Olly with great difficulty kept quiet, and began eating up his pudding very fast, as if that was the only way of keeping his little tongue out of mischief.

"Father," he said, after dinner, "do take Milly out for a walk and mother shall take me. Then I can't tell, you know."

So the two went out different ways, and Olly kept away from Milly all day, in great fear lest somehow or other his secret should fly out of him, in spite of all his efforts to keep it in. At night the children made nurse hurry them to bed, so that when mother came to tuck them up, as she generally did, she found the pair fast asleep, and nothing left to kiss but two curly heads buried in the pillows.

"Bless their hearts!" said nurse to Mrs. Norton, "they can think of nothing but to-morrow. They'll be sadly disappointed if it rains."

But the stars came out and the new moon shone softly all night on the great fir-trees and the rosebuds and the little dancing beck in the Ravensnest garden; and when Milly awoke next morning the sun was shining, and Brownholme was towering up clear and high into the breezy blue sky, and the trees were throwing cool shadows on the dewy lawn round the house.

"Oh dear!" said Milly, jumping up, her face flushing with joy; "it's my birthday, and it's fine. Nana, bring me my things, please. But where's Olly?"

Where indeed was Olly? There was his little bed, but there was a little night-dress rolled up in it, and not a wisp of his brown curls was to be seen anywhere.

"Why, Miss Milly, are you woke up at last? I hardly thought you'd have slept so late this morning. Many happy returns of the day to you," said nurse, giving her a hearty hug.

"Thank you, *dear* nurse. Oh, it is so nice having birthdays! But where can Olly be?"

"Don't you trouble your head about him," said nurse mysteriously; and not another word could Milly get out of her. She had just slipped on her white cotton frock when mother opened the door.

"Well, birthday-girl! The top of the morning to you, and many, many happy returns of the day."

Whereupon Milly and mother went through a great deal of kissing, which need not be described, and then mother helped her brush her hair and put on her ribbon and tie her sash, so that in another minute or two she was quite ready to go down.

"Now, Milly, wait one minute till you hear the bell ring, and then you may come down as fast as you like."

So Milly waited, her little feet dancing with impatience, till the bell began to ring as if it had gone quite mad.

"Oh, that's Olly ringing," cried Milly, rushing off. And sure enough, when she got to the hall there was Olly ringing as if he meant to bring the house down. He dropped the bell when he saw Milly, and dragged her breathlessly into the dining-room.

And what did Milly see there, I wonder. Why, a heap of red and white roses lying on the breakfast-table, a big heap, with odd corners and points sticking up all over it, and under the roses a white napkin, and under the napkin treasures of all sorts: a book from father, a little work-box from mother, with a picture of Windermere on the outside, and inside the most delightful cottons and needles and bits of bright-coloured stuffs; a china doll's dinner-service from Aunt Emma, a mug from nurse, a little dish full of big red strawberries from gardener; and last, but not least, Olly's present, a black paint-box, with colours and brushes and all complete, and tied up with a little drawing-book which mother had added to make it really useful. At the top of the heap, too, lay two letters, addressed in very big round hand to "Miss Milly Norton," and one was signed Jacky and the other signed Francis. Each of these presents had neat little labels fastened on to them, and they were smothered in roses, deep red and pale pink roses, with the morning dew sprinkled over them.

"We got all those roses, mother and me, this morning, when you was fast asleep, Milly," shouted Olly, who was capering about like a mad creature. "Mother pulled me out of bed ever so early, and I putted on my goloshes, and didn't we get wet just? Milly, *isn't* my paint-box a beauty?"

But it's no good trying to describe what Milly felt. She felt as every happy little girl feels on a happy birthday—just a little bit bewitched, as if she had got into another kind of world altogether.

"Now," said father after breakfast, "I'm yours, Milly, for all this morning. What are you going to do with me?"

"Make you into a tiger, father, and shoot you," said Olly, who would have liked to play at hunting and shooting games all day long.

"I didn't ask you, sir," said Mr. Norton; "I'm not yours—I'm Milly's. Now, Milly, what shall we do?"

"Will you take us right to the top of Brownholme, father? You know we haven't been to the very top yet."

"Very well, we'll go if your legs will carry you. But you must ask them very particularly first how they feel, for it'll be stiff work for them."

Not very long after breakfast, and before they started for their walk, Aunt Emma's pony carriage came rattling up the drive, and she, too, brought flowers for Milly, above all a bunch of waterlilies all wet from the lake; and then she and mother settled under the trees with their books and work while the children started on their walk.

But first Milly had drawn mother into a corner where no one could see, and there, with a couple of tears in her two blue eyes, she had whispered in a great hurry, so that Mrs. Norton could scarcely hear, "I don't want to have everything just as *I* like to-day, mother. Can't I do what somebody else likes? I'd rather."

Which means that Milly was a good deal excited and her heart very full, and that she was thinking of how, a year before, her birthday had been rather spoilt towards the end of it by a little bit of crossness and self-will, that she remembered afterwards with a pang for many a long day. Since then

Milly had learnt a good deal more of that long, long lesson, which we go on learning, big people and little people, all our lives—the lesson of self-forgetting; of how love brings joy, and to be selfish is to be sad; and her birthday seemed to bring back to her all that she had been learning.

"Dear little woman," said Mrs. Norton, putting back her tangled hair from her anxious little face, "go and be happy. That's what we all like to-day. Besides, you'll find plenty of ways of doing what other people like before the end of the day, without my inventing any. Run along, now, and climb away. Mind you don't let Olly tumble into bogs, and mind you bring me a bunch of ferns for the dinner-table—and there'll be two things done at any rate."

So away ran Milly; and all the morning she and Olly and father scrambled and climbed and raced and chatted on the green back of old Brownholme. They went to say "good morning" to John Backhouse's cows in the "intak," as he called his top field, and they just peeped over the wall at the fierce young bull he had bought at Penrith Fair a

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THEY WENT TO SAY "GOOD MORNING" TO JOHN BACKHOUSE'S COWS.

few days before, and which looked as if, birthdays or no birthdays, he could have eaten Milly at two mouthfuls and swallowed Olly down afterwards without knowing it.

Then they climbed and climbed after father, till, just as Olly was beginning to feel his legs to make sure they weren't falling off, they were so tired and shaky, there they were standing on the great pile of stones which marks the top of the mountain—the very tip-top of all its green points and rocks and grassy stretches. By this time the children knew the names of most of the mountains round and of all the lakes. They went through them now like a lesson with their father; and even Olly remembered a great many, and could chatter about Helvellyn and Fairfield and Langdale Pikes as if he had trudged to the top of them all himself.

Then came the getting down again. Father and Milly and Olly, hand-in-hand, racing over the short, fine grass, startling the little black-faced sheep, and racing down the steep bits, where Milly and Olly generally tumbled over in some sort of a heap at the bottom. As for the flowers they gathered, there were so many I have no time to tell you about them—wood-flowers and bog-flowers and grass-flowers, and ferns of all sizes to mix with them, from the great Osmunda, which grew along the Ravensnest beck, down to the tiny little parsley fern. It was all delightful—the sights and the sounds, and the fresh mountain wind that blew them about on the top; so that long afterwards Milly used to look back to that walk on Brownholme, when she was seven years old, as one of the merriest times she ever spent.

Dinner was very welcome after all this scrambling; and after dinner came a quiet time in the garden, when father read aloud to mother and Aunt Emma, and the children kept still and listened to as much as they could understand, at least until they went to sleep, which they both did, lying on a rug at Aunt Emma's feet. Milly couldn't understand how this had happened at all, when she found herself waking up and rubbing her eyes; but I think it was natural enough after their long walk in the sun and wind.

At four o'clock nurse came for them, and when they had been put into clean frocks

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

BECKY AND TIZA WERE WAITING FOR THEM.

and pinafores she took them up to the farm. Milly and Olly felt that this was a very solemn occasion, and they walked up to the farmhouse door hand-in-hand, feeling as shy as if they had never been there before. But at the door were Becky and Tiza waiting for them, as smart as new pins, with shining hair, and red ribbons under their little white collars; and the children no sooner caught sight of one another than all their shyness flew away and they began to chatter as usual.

In the farmhouse kitchen were Bessie and Charlie, and such a comfortable tea spread out on a long table, covered with a red and black woollen tablecloth instead of a white one. Becky and Tiza had filled two tumblers with meadow-sweet and blue campanula, which stood up grandly in the middle, and there were two home-made cakes at each end, and some of Sally's brown eggs, and piles of tempting bread-and-butter.

Each of the children had a gift for Milly too: Becky had plaited her a basket of rushes, a thing she had often tried to teach Milly how to make for herself; and Tiza pushed a bunch of wild raspberries into her hand and ran away before Milly could say "thank you"; Bessie shyly produced a Christmas-card that somebody had once sent to her; and even Charlie had managed to provide himself with a bunch of the wild yellow poppies which grew on the wall of the Ravensnest garden, and were a joy to all beholders.

Then Mrs. Backhouse put Milly at one end of the table while she began to pour out tea at the other, and the feast began. Certainly, Milly thought, it was much more exciting going out to tea at a farmhouse than having children to tea with you at home, just as you might anywhere, on any day in the year. There were the big hens coming up to the door and poking in their long necks to take a look at them; there were the pigeons circling round and round in the yard; there was the sound of milking going on in the shed close by, and many other sights and sounds which were new and strange and delightful.

As for Olly, he was very much taken up for a time with the red and black tablecloth, and could not be kept from peering underneath it from time to time, as if he suspected that the white tablecloth he was generally accustomed to had been hidden away underneath for a joke. But when the time for cake came, Olly forgot the tablecloth altogether. He had never seen a cake quite like the bun-loaf which kind Mrs. Backhouse had made herself for the occasion, and of which she had given him a hunch; so in his usual inquisitive way he began to turn it over and over, as if by looking at it long enough he could find out how it was made and all about it. Presently, when the others were all quietly enjoying their bun-loaf, Olly's shrill little voice was heard saying—while he put two separate fingers on two out of the few currants in his piece:

"*This* currant says to *that* currant, 'I'm here, where are you? You're so far off I can't see you nowhere.'"

"Olly, be quiet!" said Milly.

"Well, but, Milly, I can't help it; it's so funny. There's only three currants in my bit, and cookie puts such a lot in at home. I'm pretending they're little children wanting to play, only they can't, they're so far off.

There, I've etten one up. Now there's only two. That's you and me, Milly. I'll eat you up first—krick!"

"Never mind about the currants, little master," said Mrs. Backhouse, laughing at him. "It's nice and sweet, any way, and you can eat as much of it as you like, which is more than you can of rich cakes."

Olly thought there was something in this, and by the time he had got through his second bit of bun-loaf he had quite made up his mind that he would get Susan to make bun-loaves at home too.

They were just finishing tea when there was a great clatter outside, and by came the hay-cart, with John Backhouse leading the horse and two men walking beside it.

"We're going to carry all the hay in yon lower field presently," he shouted to his wife as he passed. "Send the young 'uns down to see."

Up they all started, and presently the whole party were racing down the hill to the river field, with Mrs. Backhouse and her baby walking soberly with nurse behind them. Yes, there lay the hay piled up in large cocks on the fresh, clean-swept carpet of bright green grass, and in the middle of the field stood the hay-cart with two horses harnessed, one man standing in it to press down and settle the hay as John Backhouse and two other men handed it up to him on pitchforks. Olly went head over heels into the middle of one of the cocks, followed by Charlie, and would have liked to go head over heels into all the rest; but Mr. Norton, who had come into the field with mother and Aunt Emma, told him he must be content to play with two cocks in one of the far corners of the field without disturbing the others, which were all ready for carrying, and that if he and Charlie strewed the hay about they must tidy it up before John Backhouse wanted to put it on the cart. So Olly and Charlie went off to their corner, and for a little while all the other children played there too. Milly had invented a game called the "Babes in the Wood," in which two children were the babes and pretended to die on the grass, and all the rest were the robins, and covered them up with hay instead of leaves. She and Tiza made beautiful babes: they put their handkerchiefs over their faces and lay as still as mice, till Olly had piled so much hay on the top of them that there was not a bit of them to be seen anywhere, while Bessie began to cry out as if she was suffocated before they had put two good armfuls over her.

Presently, however, Milly got tired; and she and Tiza walked off by themselves and sat down by the river to get cool. The water in the river was quite low again now, and the children could watch the tiny minnows darting and flashing about by the bank, and even amuse themselves by fancying every now and then that they saw a trout shooting across the clear brown water. Tiza had quite left off being shy now with Milly, and the two chattered away, Milly telling Tiza all about her school, and Jacky and Francis and Spot, and the garden at home; and Tiza telling Milly about her father's new bull—how frightened she and Becky were of him and how father meant to make the fence stronger for fear he should get out and toss people.

"What a happy little party!" said Aunt Emma to mother, looking round the field; "there's nothing like hay for children."

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THEY PUT THEIR HANDKERCHIEFS OVER THEIR FACES, AND LAY AS STILL AS MICE.

By this time the hay-cart was quite full, and crack! went John Backhouse's whip as he took hold of the first horse's head and gave him a pull forward to start the cart on its way to the farm.

"Gee-up!" shouted John in his loud, cheery voice, and the horse made a step forward, while the children round cried "Hurrah!" and waved their hands. But suddenly there was a loud, piteous cry, which made John give the horse a sudden push back and drop his whip; and then, from where they sat, Milly and Tiza heard a sound of crying and screaming, while everybody in the field ran towards the hay-cart. They ran too. What could have happened?

Just as they came up to the crowd of people round the cart, Milly saw her father with something in his arms. And this something was Becky—poor little Becky, with a great mark on her temple and her eyes quite shut, and such a white face!

"Oh! mother! mother!" cried Milly, rushing up to her; "tell me, mother, what is the matter with Becky?"

But Mrs. Norton had no time to attend to her. She was running to meet Mrs. Backhouse, who had come hurrying up from another part of the field with the baby in her arms.

"She was under the cart when it moved on," said Mrs. Norton, taking the baby from her. "We none of us know how it happened. She must have been trying to hand up some hay at the last moment and tumbled under. I don't think her head is much hurt."

On ran Mrs. Backhouse, and Milly and her mother followed.

"Better let me carry her up now without moving her," said Mr. Norton, as Mrs. Backhouse tried to take the little bundle from him. "She has fainted, I think. We must get some water at the stream." So on he went with the pale, frightened mother, while the others followed. Aunt Emma had got Tiza and Milly by the hand, and was trying to comfort them.

"We hope she is not much hurt, darlings; the wheel did not go over her, thank God! It was just upon her when her father backed the horse. But it must have crushed her, I'm afraid, and there was something hanging

SO ON THEY WENT AGAIN.

under the cart which gave her that knock on the temple. Look, there is one of the men starting off for the doctor."

Whereupon Tiza, who had kept quiet till then, burst into a loud fit of crying and threw herself down on the grass.

"Nurse," called Aunt Emma, "stay here with these two poor little ones while I go and see if I can be of any use."

So nurse came and sat beside them, and Milly crept up to her for comfort. But poor little Tiza lay with her face buried in the grass, and nothing they could say to her seemed to reach her little deaf ears.

Meanwhile, Aunt Emma hurried after the others, and presently caught them up at a stream where Mr. Norton had stopped to bathe Becky's head and face. The cold water had just revived her when Aunt Emma came up, and for one moment she opened her heavy blue eyes and looked at her mother, who was bending over her, and then they shut again. But her little hand went feebly searching for her mother, who caught it up and kissed it.

"Oh! Miss Emma, Miss Emma," she said,

pointing to the child, "I'm afeard but she's badly hurt."

"I hope not, with all my heart," said Aunt Emma, gently taking her arm. "But the doctor will soon be here; we must get her home before he comes."

So on they went again, Mr. Norton still carrying Becky and Mr. Backhouse helping his wife along. Mrs. Norton had got the baby safe in her motherly arms, and so they all toiled up the hill to the farmhouse. What a difference from the merry party that ran down the hill only an hour before!

They laid Becky down on her mother's bed, and then Aunt Emma, finding that Mrs. Norton wished to stay till the doctor came, went back to the children. She found a sad little group sitting in the hayfield: Milly in nurse's lap crying quietly every now and then, Tiza still sobbing on the grass, and Olly, who had just crept down from the farmhouse, where he and Charlie had seen Becky carried in, talking to nurse in eager whispers, as if he daren't talk out loud.

"Oh, Aunt Emma," cried Milly, when she opened the gate, "is she better?"

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

TIZA BEGAN TO CRY AGAIN.

"A little, I think, Milly, but the doctor will soon be here and then we shall know all about it. Tiza, you poor little woman, Mrs. Wheeler says you must sleep with them to-night. Your mother will want the house very quiet; and to-morrow, you know, you can go and see Becky if the doctor says you may."

At this Tiza began to cry again more piteously than ever. It seemed so dreary and terrible to her to be shut out from home without Becky. But Aunt Emma sat down on the grass beside her, and lifted her up and talked to her. With anybody else Tiza would have kicked and struggled, for she was a curious, passionate child, and her grief was always wild and angry, but nobody could struggle with Aunt Emma, and at last she let herself be comforted a little by the tender voice and soft, caressing hand. She stopped crying, and then they all took her up to the Wheelers' cottage, where Mrs. Wheeler, a kind, motherly body, took her in and promised that she should know everything there was to be known about Becky.

"Aunt Emma," said Milly presently, when

they were all sitting in the conservatory which ran round the house, waiting for Mr. Norton to bring them news from the farm, "how did Becky tumble under the cart?"

"She was lifting up some hay, I think, which had fallen off, and one of the men was stooping down to take it on his fork, and then she must have slipped and fallen right under the cart, just as John Backhouse told the horse to go on."

"Oh, if the wheel *had* gone over!" said Milly, shuddering. "Isn't it a sad birthday, Aunt Emma? and we were so happy a little while ago. And then I can't understand. I don't know why it happens like this."

"Like what, Milly?"

"Why, Aunt Emma, always in stories, you know, it's the bad people get hurt and die. And now it's poor little Becky that's hurt. And she's such a dear little girl, and helps her mother so; I don't think she ought to have been hurt."

"We don't know anything about 'oughts,' Milly darling, you and I. God knows, we trust; and that helps many people who love God to be patient when they are in trouble or pain. But think if it had been poor mischievous little Tiza who had been hurt—how she would have fretted. And now very likely Becky will bear it beautifully, and so, without knowing it, she will be teaching Tiza to be patient, and it will do Tiza good to have to help Becky and take care of her for a bit, instead of letting Becky always look after her and get her out of scrapes."

"Oh, and Aunt Emma, can't we all take care of Becky? What can Olly and I do?" said Milly imploringly.

"I can go and sing all my songs to Becky," said Olly, looking up brightly.

"By and by, perhaps," said Aunt Emma, smiling and patting his head. "But hark! isn't that father's step?"

It had grown so dark that they could hardly see who it was opening the gate.

"Oh yes, it is!" cried Milly. "It's father and mother." Away they ran to meet them, and Mrs. Norton took Milly's little pale face in both her hands and kissed it.

"She's not *very* badly hurt, darling. The doctor says she must lie quite quiet for two or three weeks, and then he hopes she'll be all right. The wheel gave her a squeeze, which jarred her poor little back and head very much, but it didn't break anything, and if she lies very quiet the doctor thinks she'll get quite well again."

"Oh, mother! and does Tiza know?"

"Yes, we have just been to tell her. Mrs. Wheeler had put her to bed, but she went up to give her our message, and she said poor little Tiza began to cry again and wanted us to tell her mother she would be *so* quiet if only they would let her come back to Becky."

"Will they, mother?"

"In a few days, perhaps. But she is not to see anybody but Mrs. Backhouse for a little while."

"Oh dear!" sighed Milly, while the tears came into her eyes again. "We shall be going away so soon, and we can't say good-bye. Isn't it sad, mother, just happening last thing? and we've been so happy all the time."

"Yes, Milly," said Mr. Norton, lifting her on to his knee. "This is the first really sad thing that ever happened to you in your little life, I think. Mother and I and Aunt Emma tell you stories about sad things, but that's very different, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Milly, thinking. "Father, are there as many sad things really as there are in stories?—you know what I mean."

"There are a great many sad things and sad people in the world, Milly. We don't have monsters plaguing us like King Hrothgar, but every day there is trouble and grief going on somewhere, and we happy and strong people must care for the sad ones if we want to do our duty and help to straighten the world a little."

"Father," whispered Milly softly, "will you tell us how—Olly and me? We would if we knew how."

"Well, Milly, suppose you begin with Becky, and poor Tiza too, indeed. I wonder whether a pair of little people could make a scrap-book for Becky to look at when she is getting better?"

"Oh yes, yes!" said Milly joyfully. "I've got ever so many pictures in mother's writing-book she let me cut out of her *Graphics*, and Olly can help paste; can't you, Olly?"

"Olly generally pastes his face more than anything else," said Mr. Norton, giving a sly pull at his brown curls. "If I'm not very much mistaken, there is a little fairy pasting up your eyes, old man."

"I'm not sleepy, not a bit," said Olly, sitting bolt upright and blinking very fast.

"I think you're not sleepy, but just asleep," said Mr. Norton, catching him up in his arms and carrying him to his mother to say good-night.

Milly went very soberly and quietly up to bed, and for some little time she lay awake, her little heart feeling very sore and heavy about the "sad things" in the world. Then, with her thoughts full of Becky, she fell asleep.

So ended Milly's birthday, a happy day and a sorrowful day, all in one. When Milly grew older there was no birthday just before or after it she remembered half so clearly as that on which she was seven years old.

CHAPTER X

LAST DAYS AT RAVENSNEST

ON Friday morning the children and their father trudged up very early to the farm to get news of Becky. She had had a bad night, Mr. Backhouse said, but she had taken some milk and beef-tea; she knew her father and mother quite well, and she had asked twice for Tiza. The doctor said they must just be patient. Quiet and rest would make her well again, and nothing else, and Tiza was not to go home for a day or two.

As for poor Tiza, a long sleep had cheered her up greatly, and when Milly and Olly went to take her out with them after breakfast, they found her almost as merry and chatty as usual. But she didn't like being kept at the Wheelers', though they were very kind to her; and it was all Mrs. Wheeler could do to prevent her from slipping up to the farm unknown to anybody.

"They don't have porridge for breakfast," said Tiza, tossing her head, when she and Milly were out together. "Mother always gives us porridge. And I won't sit next Charlie. He's always dirtying hisself. He stickied hisself just all over this morning with treacle. Mother would have given him a clout."

However, on the whole, she was as good as such a wild creature could be, and the children and she had some capital times together. Wheeler the gardener let them gather strawberries and currants for making jam, a delightful piece of work, which helped to keep Tiza out of mischief and make her contented with staying away from home more than anything else. At last, after three days, the doctor said she might come home if she would promise to be quiet in the house. So one bright evening Tiza slipped into the farmhouse and squeezed in after her mother to the little room where Becky was lying, a white-faced, feverish little creature, low down among the pillows.

"Becky," said Tiza, sitting down beside her

TIZA KNELT ON THE BED, AND STUFFED A STRAWBERRY SOFTLY INTO BECKY'S MOUTH.

sister as if nothing had happened, "here's some strawberries. Wheeler gave me some. You can have some if you want."

"Just one," said Becky, in her weak, shaky voice, smiling at her; and Tiza knelt on the bed and stuffed one softly into her mouth.

"You'll have to nurse baby now, Tiza," said Becky presently; "he's been under mother's feet terrible. Mind you don't let him eat nasty things. He'll get at the coals if you don't mind him."

"I'll not let him," said Tiza shortly, setting to work on her own strawberries.

All this didn't sound very affectionate, but I think all the same Tiza did love Becky, and I believe she tried to do her best in her own funny way while Becky was ill. Baby screamed a good deal certainly when she nursed him, and it was quite impossible, of course, for Tiza to keep out of mischief altogether for two or three weeks. Still, on the whole, she was a help to her mother; while as for Becky, she was never quite happy when Tiza was out of the house. Becky, like Milly, had a way of loving everybody about her, and next to her mother she loved Tiza best of anybody.

After all, the children were able to say goodbye to Becky. Just the day before they were to go away Mr. Backhouse came down to say that Becky would like to see them very much if they could come, and the doctor said they might.

So up they went—Milly a good deal excited, and Olly very curious to see what Becky would look like. Mr. Backhouse took them in, and they found Becky lying comfortably on a little bed with a patchwork counterpane, and her shoulders and arms covered up in a red flannel dressing-gown that Aunt Emma had sent her.

Milly kissed her and Olly shook her hand, and they didn't all quite know what to say.

"Is your back better?" said Milly at last. "I'm so glad the doctor let us come."

"Haven't you got a bump?" asked Olly, looking at her with all his eyes. "We thought you'd have a great black bump on your forehead, you know—ever so big."

"No, it's a cut," said Becky; "there now, you can see how it's plastered up."

"Did it hurt?" said Olly; "did you kick? I should have kicked. And does the doctor give you nasty medicine?"

MR. BACKHOUSE TOOK THEM IN.

"No," said Becky, "I don't have any now. And it wasn't nasty at all what I had first. And now I may have strawberries and raspberries, and Mr. Wheeler sends mother a plate every day."

"I don't think it's fair that little boys shouldn't never be ill," said Olly, with his eyes fastened on Becky's plate of strawberries, which was on the chest of drawers.

"Oh, you funny boy!" said Milly. "Why, mother gives you some every day, though you aren't ill; and I'm sure you wouldn't like staying in bed."

"Yes, I should," said Olly, just for the sake of contradicting. "Do you know, Becky, we've got a secret, and we're not to tell it you, only Milly and I are going to——"

"Don't!" said Milly, putting her hand over his mouth. "You'll tell in a minute. You're always telling secrets."

"Well, just half, Milly—I won't tell it all, you know. It's just like something burning inside my mouth. We're going to make you something, Becky, when we get home. Something be-ootiful, you know. And you can look at it in bed, and we won't make it big, so you can turn over the pages, and——"

"Be quiet, Olly," said Milly; "I should think Becky 'll guess now. It'll come by post, Becky. Mother's going to help us make it. You'll like it, I know."

"It's—it's—a picture-book!" said Olly, in a loud whisper, putting his head down to Becky. "You won't tell, will you?"

"Oh, you unkind boy!" said Milly, pouting. "I'll never have a secret with you again."

But Becky looked very pleased, and said she would like a picture-book, she thought, very much, for it was dull sometimes when mother was busy and Tiza was nursing baby. So perhaps, after all, it didn't matter having told her.

"I'm going to write to you, Becky," said Milly, when the time came to go away; "and at Christmas I'll send you a Christmas-card; and perhaps some day we'll come here again, you know."

"And then we'll milk the cows," said Olly; "won't we, Becky? And I'll ride on your big horse. Mr. Backhouse says I may ride all alone some day when I'm big—when I'm sixty—no, when I'm ninety-five, you know."

And then Milly and Olly kissed Becky's pale little face and went away, while poor little Becky looked after them as if she was *very* sorry to see the last of them; and outside there were Tiza and baby and Mrs. Backhouse, and even John Backhouse himself, waiting to say goodbye to them. It made Milly cry a little bit, and she ran away fast down the hill while Tiza and Olly were still trying which could squeeze hands hardest.

"Oh, you dear mountains!" said Milly, as she and nurse walked along together. "Look, Nana, aren't they lovely?"

They did look beautiful this last evening. The sun was shining on them so brightly that everything on them, up to the very top, was clear and plain, and high up, ever so far away, were little white dots moving, which Milly knew were cows feeding.

"Goodbye river, goodbye stepping-stones, goodbye doves, goodbye fly-catchers! Mind you don't any of you go away till we come back again."

But I should find it very hard to tell you all the goodbyes that Milly and Olly said to the places and people at Ravensnest, to the woods and the hayfields and the beck, to Aunt Emma's parrot, John Backhouse's cows, to Windermere Lake and Rydal Lake, above all to dear Aunt Emma herself.

"Mind you come at Christmas," shouted the children, as the train moved away from Windermere station and left Aunt Emma standing on the platform; and Aunt Emma nodded and smiled and waved her handkerchief to them till they were quite out of sight.

"Mother," said Milly, when they could not see Aunt Emma any more, and the last bit of Brownholme was slipping away, away, quite out of sight, "I think Ravensnest is the nicest place we ever stopped at. And I don't think the rain matters either. I'm going to tell your old gentleman so. He said it rained in the mountains, and it does, mother—doesn't it? but he said the rain spoilt everything, and it doesn't—not a bit."

"Why, there's that curious old fairy been sprinkling dust in your eyes too, Milly!"

But something or other had been sprinkling tears in mother's. For to the old people there is nothing sweeter than to see the young ones opening their hearts to all that they themselves have loved and rejoiced over. So the chain of life goes on, and joy gives birth to joy and love to love.

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